

Mac - Skene
A

VIEW

OF THE

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

OF THE PRESENT

WAR WITH FRANCE.

BY THE HONOURABLE THOMAS ERSKINE.

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ON the 26th of last December his Majesty, by a gracious message to both Houses of Parliament, communicated, with the utmost concern, the abrupt termination of the late negotiation with France, and directed the details of the embassy to be laid before them for their consideration.

Upon this occasion it appeared, that the negotiation had terminated upon a difference totally unconnected with the original causes of the war. It was manifest, that this country had completely abandoned the principles which, in the face of all Europe, the great confederacy against France had assigned as the justification of hostilities. The return of peace (now removed to an incalculable distance) turned entirely upon territorial cessions, neither in fact nor in principle contested at the time of the rupture, but which, as will appear by the following pages, were put at the feet of Great Britain, as the arbitres of universal tranquillity.

This was our condition. The object of the contest totally sunk, but the contest continuing without prospect of conclusion; one hundred millions of debt added to the former grievous weight of national incumbrances; many channels of our commerce obstructed, and our manufactures suffering in proportion; objects of revenue within the pale of luxury threatening unproduction from the necessity of extending them beyond what luxuries will carry; whilst the sinews of the laborious poor were cracking under the burdens already imposed upon all the necessaries of life.

The English people had heretofore been characterised

by an extreme jealousy of their government ; by a disposition rather to magnify, and even to imagine evils, than to submit without inquiry to actual and unexampled calamities. A great public sensation might, therefore, have been expected from such a conjuncture ; more especially as the near approach of peace had been industriously circulated and anxiously anticipated ; yet, as far as I have been able to inform myself, no public event of any magnitude ever appeared to be received with more perfect indifference and unconcern. Instead of any desire to question the prudence of the public councils, to review the past, or to provide for the future, it appeared to be more than ever the prevailing, and seemingly exulting maxim, that government must be supported ; mixed too with a considerable degree of bitterness against all who questioned its proceedings.

That government must be supported is a maxim just and incontrovertible, when properly understood. But the administration and the government have of late been confounded and identified. A change in the one is considered as a subversion of the other ; and a disposition to remove abuses, under any regulations, is accounted, even by those who admit and lament their existence, as an attack upon the constitution which suffers from them.

It is from this wide-spread sensation that the authors of our present calamities are cherished and supported, even by those who condemn them ; whilst they, who with wisdom and perseverance have opposed all the measures which produced them, are discredited and distrusted.

Such an unnatural change in the feelings and characters of Englishmen has naturally given rise to speculations upon its causes. It is impossible to ascribe it wholly either to the general increase of luxury, or to the enormous increase of the crown's influence : these are capable, indeed, of producing great changes in the public character, and are fast producing them ; but their march is too slow to have reached so suddenly to the pitch we are arrived at. The state of the public mind must therefore be otherwise accounted for, and another cause has accordingly been assigned for it—the phenomenon of the French revolution, and its mighty influence upon the higher orders of men. This is true in part : the French revolution,

and its mighty influence upon the higher orders of men. This is true in part: the French revolution is the cause, but not the only cause; it would have probably subsided quickly, and with consequences extremely different, but for the cotemporary phenomenon of the power and character of the British minister.

Within all our memories another great revolution has taken place, scarcely less striking and extraordinary, as it applied to alarm the government of Great Britain. The foundation of republican America had a similar, if not an equal, tendency to produce the same disposition in the people to an indiscriminate support of ministers. If degrees of comparisons were necessary to my argument, I might assert, that the era of the American war had even a more natural and obvious tendency than the later one in France to collect the landed and monied interest of England in a blind support of the ministers of the day.

The revolution in America, like the revolution of France, exhibited to the world the danger of suffering the general grievances of a people, real or imaginary, to remain unredressed; but with this striking difference—the revolution in France was the subversion of a foreign government; that of America was the destruction of our own: the discontents that provoked the French to resistance were abuses which could not be felt by Englishmen under any misgovernment; but the Americans were revolted subjects, and the cause of their revolt was the abuses and corruptions in our own constitution: the very abuses and corruptions which are complained of to this hour. Yet so impossible is it to take any correct account of the events of the world, without attending to the characters of men who are the actors in them; so vain is it to think of tracing civil consequences from their causes, as if we were dealing with the operations of matter, that, unless we look to the accidental impulses arising from individual predominancy, we should be constantly deceived. The American convulsion produced a sensation in England directly the reverse of what is felt at this moment; and the same man gave to the two events, so calculated to have produced corresponding effects, a direction and consequences diametrically opposite. With the one he roused the British democracy to threaten the corruptions

of the other orders which had tainted and enslaved it; with the other he now frightens the people into a surrender of their best privileges, and claims the title of an upright minister upon principles which he repeatedly and solemnly declared to be utterly inconsistent with the very existence of an upright administration.

It may be said, that the two revolutions were very different.—Very different indeed.—It is now too late to rail at or fight with the one, and our railing and fighting have created almost all the evils of the other. America and France began their revolutions upon the same principles, but with very different fortunes. America had no ancient internal aristocracy—France had nothing else. America had to contend with England only; a contention which gave her France to protect her: France had to contend against the world. When England had exhausted and disgraced herself, America was therefore free; but France had to exhaust and disgrace the world, and in the dreadful effort has been driven to extremities which frequently has disgraced herself. But, with these accidental differences, the objects were the same: discontent occasioned by abuses produced both revolutions. Both governments might have continued monarchical, if corrupt power would have submitted to correction: they are now both free representative republics; and if corruption will not yet be corrected, let her look to herself.

During the first of these great æras, Mr. Pitt began his public life, under circumstances so splendid and so honourable to himself, that, having no personal enmity towards him, it is painful to me to recur to them; indeed, if any part of what is written hereafter shall appear to be dictated by so unworthy a motive, I utterly and solemnly disclaim it. I make no attack upon his private character; but the public existence is at stake: Mr. Pitt is a minister in a most awful crisis: I feel a duty in examining his conduct in that capacity, and my public conduct in opposing him is equally open to the animadversion of the world. It is only by looking back to the past that we can hope to correct the future; and when delusion has overspread a nation, the illumination of an angel would only darken it, unless the causes of it were first detected and exposed. To obtain security for England, we must look back to the

time when she was at peace : we must examine the causes and progress of the war ; must retrace all our steps, and look, if we dare, to what they lead.

Towards the close of the American war, Mr. Pitt (a boy almost), saw the corrupt condition of Parliament, from the defect in the representation of the people, with the eyes of a mature statesman : the eagle eyes of his father had seen it before him, and the thunder of his eloquence had made it tremble. Lord Chatham had detected and exposed the rank corruption of the House of Commons as the sole cause of that fatal quarrel, and left it as a legacy to his son to avenge and to correct them. The youthful exertions of Mr. Pitt were worthy of the delegation.—From my acquaintance with him, both before and upon his first entrance into public life, I have no doubt of his perfect sincerity in the cause he then undertook ; and the maturity of his judgment, even at that time, with which I was well acquainted, secures his conduct from the rashness of unthinking youth. His efforts are in the memory of the whole public, and their miscarriage at that time are not, in my opinion, to be imputed to him.

Corruption and abuse, always uniform, opposed to Mr. Pitt's propositions of reformation the identical objections which, *under his own auspices*, they oppose to all reformation now ; and Parliament at that time, like the late Parliament, for motives which I leave to every man's own reflection, rejected reformation in all its shapes. Within the walls of the House of Commons, the proprietors of boroughs expressed their indignation (as they have lately, and as they would to-morrow) that such a preposterous time should be chosen for alteration, however wise or regulated, as the conclusion of the American war ; the empire, they said, had been rent asunder by the fermentation of political opinions ; that our colonists had become republicans ; and that if the door were once opened to changes, who should prescribe their limits ?

These arguments triumphed in the House of Commons, but Mr. Pitt triumphed with the disinterested part of the nation. His arguments for chusing that crisis were convincing and unanswerable. The cause of reform was highly popular, and men of the greatest rank and fortune took the lead in it. Irregularities of course were committed,

but the public mind was found. Libels on Parliament at that time, as since, were written; but Mr. Pitt's were unquestionably the strongest and the best. Public meetings, to take the sense of the people upon the conduct of the House of Commons in rejecting the proposition, were universally promoted; but those of Mr. Pitt, at the Thatched House Tavern, (as might be expected from his talents and the influence of his supporters) were by much the most systematical, and the most alarming to government.

Soon after this period Mr. Pitt became prime minister, an object of overreaching ambition for a very young person, and indeed, independently of that, it is but justice to remark, that whatever disposition he might have had to serve the King and rule the British Parliament, according to the liberal principles with which he began his public life, his Majesty, without very essential changes, could not be so served, nor a British Parliament be so conducted.

It would be unfair, in a publication addressed to the world, to presume to trace the insensible changes in the mind of the minister upon the favourite object of his youth, the nurse of his fame, and his conductor to power; I know enough of the corruptions inseparable from the administration of a government which must be managed upon the principles of our own at present, to be able to make many allowances. It is enough for my present purpose, that Mr. Pitt first totally abandoned his own opinions, and afterwards became the opposer, and even the persecutor of all who continued to preserve them.

I will not leave it to his advocates to remark, that though he had indeed abandoned the cause of reform, yet that the condition of things was in some respects changed when he made his grand attack upon the reformers: that the French revolution had intervened; that it had caused a great fermentation in the minds of men; that it appeared to have given to the zeal of some British reformers a tinge of republicanism; and that the effects and consequences of that great event had read an awful lesson to the world. Had Mr. Pitt acted with good faith upon these considerations, if he really entertained them, I know enough of the character of his understanding to believe that his conduct would have been different; and his ori-

ginal principle, on which he rested the whole of his memorable argument for the reform of Parliament, confirms me in that belief. Mr. Pitt's principle, illustrated by the American contest, was, that the holding high the abuses of government had been the foundation of all danger and violence to its authority. He would therefore have again brought forward the British constitution in its purity, as an antidote to republican speculations; confident that from his situation, and from the double hold he would have had by it over the nation, he might have given the spirit of reform his own direction, and moulded it to his own will. But unfortunately for England, he could not do this *without at least a temporary sacrifice of his station as minister*; Mr. Pitt, therefore, chose to remain in his station upon the only principles in which, without reform, it could possibly be maintained.

Having made this election, it is impossible, without the grossest injustice, to deny that he has conducted himself with the masterly skill, and with a boldness without example in the history of the minister of any regular government. The enthusiasm for English reform, animated in its zeal from the struggles of the first reformers of France, when the Bastile fell, and when the Parliament of Paris opened its doors to the representatives of the nation, began to assume an energy of which wisdom and virtue might have taken the safe direction, but which, I admit, at the same time, required either to be managed by a liberal support from government, or to be checked in its excesses by a prudent and constitutional restraint. The British minister took neither of these courses. Too old in office to put his situation to hazard, by supporting the liberal principles which bestowed it; too bold and too strongly supported to employ caution in his remedy; embittered, perhaps, with the reflection of his own defection, and with the reproaches levelled at him, he seems to have resolved to cut the Gordian knot with a sword. Alarmed at the contagion of liberty from France, he determined to cut off all communication between the two nations, and to keep them separated at the chance, or rather the certainty, from his own creation, of a general war in Europe.

For this purpose the honest but irregular zeal of some societies, instituted for the reform of Parliament, furnish-

ed a seasonable but a contemptible pretext; they had sent congratulations to the French government when it had ceased to be monarchical: in their correspondencies through the country on the abuses and corruptions of the British constitution, they had unfortunately mixed many ill-timed and extravagant encomiums upon the revolution of France, whilst its practice, for the time, had broke loose from the principles which deserved them; and, in their just indignation towards the confederacies then forming in Europe, they wrote many severe strictures against their monarchical establishments, from which the mixed principles of our own government were not strictly or prudently separated. They wrote besides, as an incitement to the reform of Parliament, many bitter observations upon the defective constitution, and the consequent corruptions of the House of Commons; some of which, according to the just theory of the law, were unquestionably libels.

These irregularities and excesses were, for a considerable length of time, wholly overlooked by government. Mr. Paine's works had been extensively and industriously circulated throughout England and Scotland; the correspondencies, which above a year afterwards became the subject of the state trials, had been printed in every newspaper, and sold without question or interruption in every shop in the kingdom; when a circumstance took place, not calculated, one would imagine, to have occasioned any additional alarm to the country, but which (mixed with the effects on the public from Mr. Burke's first celebrated publication on the French Revolution,) seems to have given rise to the King's Proclamation, the first act of government regarding France and her affairs.

A few gentlemen, not above fifty in number, consisting principally of persons of rank, talents, and character, formed themselves into a society, under the name of the Friends of the People. They had observed with concern, as they professed in the published motives of their association, the grossly unequal representation of the people in the House of Commons; its effects upon the measures of government; but above all, its apparent tendency to lower the dignity of Parliament, and to deprive it of the opinion of the people. Their avowed object was, therefore, to bring the very cause, which Mr. Pitt had so recently taken the lead in, fairly and respectfully be-

fore the House of Commons ; in hopes, as they declared, to tranquillise the agitated part of the public, to restore affection and respect for the legislature, so necessary to secure submission to its authority ; and, by concentrating the views of all reformers to the preservation of our invaluable constitution, to prevent that fermentation of political opinion, which the French revolution had undoubtedly given rise to, from taking a republican direction in Great Britain.* These were not only the professed objects of this association, but the truth and good faith of them received afterwards the sanction of judicial authority, when their proceedings were brought forward by government in the course of the state trials.

Nevertheless, on the very day that Mr. Grey, at the desire of this small society, gave notice of his intended motion in the House of Commons, there was an instantaneous movement amongst ministers, as if a great national conspiracy had been discovered. No act of government appeared to have been in agitation before that period, although the correspondencies before alluded to, had, for months, been public and notorious, and there was scarcely an information, even for a libel, upon the file of the Court of King's Bench. Nevertheless, a council was almost immediately held, and his Majesty was advised to issue his royal proclamation of the 21st of May, 1792, to rouse the vigilance and attention of the magistrates throughout the kingdom to the vigorous discharge of their duties.

If this had been the only object of the proclamation, and if it had been followed up by no other proceedings than the suppression of libels, and a coercive respect for the authorities of Parliament, it would have been happy for England ; unfortunately it seemed to have other objects, which, if as a subject of the country I have no right to condemn, I may at least, with the freedom of history, be now allowed to lament.

The proclamation had unquestionably for its object to spread the alarm against French principles ; and, to do it effectually, all principles were considered as French by his Majesty's ministers which questioned the infallibility of their own government, or which looked towards the least

* I declare, upon my honour, these were my reasons for becoming a member of that society.

change in the representation of the people in Parliament.

If it had issued, however, under the authority of the British ministry only, it probably could not have produced its important and unfortunate effects. But the minister, before he advised the measure, had taken care to secure the disunion of the Whig party, which had hitherto firmly and uniformly opposed both the principles and practice of his administration. To this body I gloried to belong, as I still do to cling even to the weather-beaten pieces of the wreck which remains of it. Neither am I ashamed of the appellation of party, when the phrase is properly understood; for without parties, cemented by the union of sound principles, evil men and evil principles cannot be successfully resisted. I flatter myself that the people of England will not hastily believe, that I have ever been actuated in my public conduct by interest or ambition.

The Whig party, as it has been called, was insignificant indeed from its numbers, and weak from the formidable influence of the crown in the hands of its adversaries; but formidable, nevertheless, from illustrious rank, great property, and splendid talents; still more from an opinion of public integrity, which formed a strong hold upon the minds of the country. I look back with the most heart-felt and dispiriting sorrow to the division of this little phalanx, whose union upon the principles which first bound them together might, in spite of differences of opinion in matters concerning which good men may fairly differ, have preserved the peace of the world, re-animated the forms of our own constitution, and averted calamities, the end of which I tremble to think of. Reflecting, however, as I do, upon the frailties of human nature, advertising to the deceptions which may be practised upon it, and which men, by insensible degrees, unconsciously practise upon themselves; compelled by candour to keep in view the unexampled crisis of the French revolution, the horrors which disfigured it, the alarms inseparable from it, but, above all, the dexterous artifices which it furnished to inflame and to mislead; I wish to draw a veil over the stages which divided statesmen and friends, at they very moment of all others when they ought to have drawn closer together, and when their union might have preserved their country. I shall, therefore, content myself with observ-

ing, that before the King's Proclamation was issued, the support of the Duke of Portland had not only probably been secured to it, but the assent of some of the most distinguished persons in the opposition had been well understood to the whole of that system of measures which ended in the war with France.

The proclamation, thus supported, was planted as the only genuine banner of loyalty throughout the kingdom; voluntary bodies, to strengthen the executive power by maintaining prosecutions, were every where instituted. Society was rent asunder, and the harmony and freedom of English manners were, for a season totally destroyed.

It was at this period that the seeds of war were sown, which ever since we have been unfortunately reaping. Nothing is more distant from my temper, or my purpose, than to fasten the charge either of corruption or folly upon all who were seized with this alarm, or who even contributed to its propagation. Many worthy and intelligent persons, superior to common weaknesses, and aloof from all meanness, were undoubtedly hurried away by its influence. It is far more pleasant to me to hope, that many of those who were active in spreading the delusion were themselves deluded, than to scatter imputation upon thousands who may be wiser and better than myself. The public, in a cooler hour, will be prepared to make the proper distinctions, and to separate the innocent from the guilty. But the effects were not the less mischievous, whatever might have been the motives; and the delusion, however it may be yet disguised by the causes which produced it, will appear in the future history of England as a blot in the annals of an enlightened age and of a free country.

The spirit which became prevalent about this time, which bore down every thing before it, and prepared the nation for war, was an absolute horror of every thing connected with France, and even for liberty itself, because France avowed to be contending for it. It confounded the casual intemperance of an enlarged and warm zeal for the freedom and happiness of mankind with a tendency to universal anarchy, and to a resistance of all governments: it considered an irritable sense of the evils attending the Christian superstitions, and a complacency under their rapid declension, as a decided apostacy from the church, and

as the sure test of irreligion, and even of atheism itself. It set down as a declared enemy to monarchy, however existing by consent, and poised, like our own, by the balances of a popular constitution, every man who did not throw up his cap when combined despotism was trampling upon the establishments, and casting lots for the territories of free men, or who dared to exult and triumph when a murderous manifesto was thrust down the throats of the tyrants who uttered it, and when a great people, determined to be free, succeeded in repelling the lawless invaders of their country.

These were the feelings which ministers at this period imputed to large classes of the people of Great Britain, and of our sister kingdom.

The imputation was made with truth: the inference only was fallacious and wicked. If the well-founded imputation of these sensations, and the habits of publicly expressing them, be political guilt, I for one plead guilty; and I thank God, above all his other blessings, that he has indelibly impressed them upon my understanding and my heart. But let us examine what were the public fruits of these dangerous emotions, which rendered it necessary to convert the nation, as it were, into a large prison, by restrictive laws, by internal military stations, and by the separations of external war.

Considerable bodies of the people were desirous of stirring the question of reform at a time when Mr. Pitt had laid it down, and the followers of the Duke of Richmond (then a cabinet minister of the King) were not only the most numerous, but were distinguished by the lengths to which they seemed to push their views upon the subject; views which I admit to have been *very little short* of those which the Duke himself had avowed and acted upon a few years before.

Whilst it continues to be the office of courts of justice to decide upon evidence, I shall maintain this to have been the extent of the designs which at the date of the proclamation, or which at any time afterwards, prevailed in this country. Not a man had been then convicted, nor has now, whilst I am writing, for any treason against the state, though the laws have been new cast and manufactured to reach cases which the venerable institutions of our forefathers did not touch; and no conspiracy against the go-

vernment had then, or has to this hour, been detected. Libels, indeed, both then and since, as at all other periods, were undoubtedly written by mischievous, turbulent, and misguided individuals. But the community at large was sound, and the object which gave the real offence was virtuous and laudable. It was to reform the representation of the House of Commons, by the ways of the constitution, by an endeavour to collect the public sentiment, and to produce it before parliament. Three English juries determined this to have been the object, and the crown never invited a fourth to contradict them. The object, therefore, was virtuous and laudable; and if the constitution is to be preserved, the renewed pursuit will alone preserve it; and it might then have been secured without a struggle, without a war with France, and without fear of her revolution—if those who have the deepest interest in the state had not been afraid of *English* liberty.

I never shall be the defender of popular excesses, nor of commotions which can endanger the peace of my country; God forbid that I should: but I know they never can arise, if men, who stand on the vantage ground in society, will only behave with common honesty and common sense. It is not yet too late for the higher orders of this country to consider well this subject. Let me implore them, while yet practicable, to give a safe direction to a spirit which neither Laws nor Wars will repress.

This spirit is at present high in Ireland, and the ~~recent~~ zeal of that brave and virtuous people has completely detected the false and pernicious calumnies upon both countries. It has demonstrated that a desire to reform abuses in the government is not at all connected with disloyalty to its establishment, and that the restoration of a free constitution by the wisdom and spirit of a nation has no alliance with, but, on the contrary, is utterly abhorrent to a submission to foreign force.

The late attempt upon Ireland ought nevertheless to make the deepest impression upon the government of England. The very sensation occasioned by it, and our congratulations upon the support of the elements, is in itself a condemnation of the measures pursued in that country.

If Ireland were conducted as she ought to be, what dependence, in God's name, could we have to place upon

the winds? Could a protective government of three millions of men, happy under the enjoyment of our free constitution, have occasion to look to a weather-glass for its safety against twenty thousand men? or could any thing but a hope of disunion, held out to an enemy by the effects of a narrow policy, have suggested so weak and feeble an expedition?

This is a hope that will remain unextinguished in France, and which may be expected to produce future and more dangerous expeditions, unless satisfaction be given to the feelings of that country. It is a dangerous mode of reckoning, that because the people have not manifested their discontent by inviting an enemy, they are therefore to be considered as contented; or, that their wishes may be the more safely neglected. It is justly observed by Locke, that nations, instead of being prone to resist their governments **without cause**, require long continued neglect and provocation to rouse them even to a reasonable and justifiable resistance. But he follows this observation by reminding the rulers of states and kingdoms, that this disposition leaves them neither justification nor protection when their authorities are subverted; and that the degree of disgust, which will at last surely overturn them, is not matter of safe or rational calculation: that the progress of disaffection is insensible and invisible, and that it is frequently hurried on to the fatal conclusion by accidents neither to be foreseen nor resisted.

These reflections ought to suggest the propriety of securing this most valuable part of the empire from the possible danger of a better concerted attack. This ought to be done, not merely by more watchful operations (as I have purposely shunned all consideration of the details of departments), but by setting the watch in the interests and affections of the Irish people.

Nothing can accomplish this but the absolute renunciation of that jealous and restrictive system of government, which characterises the present administration every where, but more than any where in that kingdom. To rule with security over that people, or over any other, in the present condition of the world, they must be set at their ease, and made happy by every indulgence within the compass of their government. To make the interest of supporting any civil establishment universal, the privileges

it confers must be made universal also. To inspire the multitude with indignation at a foreign enemy, they must be made to feel practically the privileges which his invasion strikes at, and the social blessings it would destroy.

It is said, that when peace arrives it may be prudent to consider these great objects. But without instant consideration of them, peace may never arrive at all. If I had the princely dominion of Ireland, and were lord of all her soil, I would choose that moment for reforming her parliament, and for complete emancipation, when the enemy was plying upon her coasts: not as acts of sudden fear, but of sound wisdom and critical justice. To withhold from great bodies of a people the freest and fullest communications of all the privileges of their government when its existence is externally threatened, is to bandage up the right arm when an enemy is approaching, and, by robbing it of its circulation, to deprive it of its strength.

But the Irish people flocked with loyalty to the standard of their country. For that very reason it should be crowned with the garland of constitutional freedom. Let the present moment be seized of making reformation a spontaneous act of liberal and enlightened policy, instead of being hereafter an act of cautious prudence, which may destroy its grace and effect. Let all the concessions of government in both countries be the concessions of wisdom and beneficence; and not, as was happily expressed by a great writer, like the restitution of stolen goods. Let the people of both countries receive the greatest degree of freedom which the true spirit of our constitution is capable of dispensing, and we may then smile at all invasions, whatever reach of coast our enemies may possess. Under such a system, instead of riots and murmurings, by coercive acts of parliament, every man would be a volunteer with a courage which no mutiny bill can inspire, and every house and cottage in Great Britain and Ireland would be a barrack for the soldiers of their country.

These are unfortunately not abstract and speculative reflections: they would have been so formerly: but they are now taught by the awful times we live in. It is the use of history and observation to be a guide for the future.

It was a restrictive system of government in Holland and the Netherlands, and the consequent divisions amongst

their inhabitants, that has suddenly altered the face of Europe by their subjugation, and it is the difference between the noble and independant pride of a free government and the vassalage of arbitrary power, that is wresting at this moment from the hands of the Emperor the sceptre of his Italian states.

The French system of fraternization, the effect of which we have seen with so much horror, could have had no other foundation. If the free governments which they subverted had not fallen off from the ends of their institutions, their subversions would have been impracticable, and the memorable decree of the 19th of November would have been the derision, instead of the terror of Europe.

I am sorry indeed to remark, that this decree, and the system of which it was a part, existed only upon paper, and in the inflammatory speeches of enthusiastic men, until confederated Europe began the actual and forcible fraternization of the monarchical part of France. When that nation had effected an internal revolution, no matter upon what principle or with what crimes, it should have occurred to her invaders, who could not have looked to subjugation but by the divisions of civil fury, that they were themselves practically pursuing that very species of hostility, the theory only of which had been an object of their execration, and the foundation of their confederacy. The same reflection ought to have deterred Great Britain from the merciless and impolitic expedition to Quiberon. The government of France had then assumed a regular form, and was in the exercise of a regular legalized authority. The devoted handful of unhappy fugitives from their country could do nothing by the sword. The expedition, therefore, was to rekindle the torch of discord amidst twenty-five millions of men beginning to escape from its former fury, and settled under an established government. Our invasion was to work by confusion against established authority ; to stir up all the elements of misery and mischief amongst the innocent part of the community, incapable of understanding the cause for which they fought, and without even the hope on our part of protecting them from the fury of the government against which they rebelled.

What was this proceeding but the very system we had

imputed to France, and proclaimed with horror to the universe?

I hope, indeed, all civilized nations will hereafter concur in stigmatizing this horrible and barbarous system of hostilities: a stranger even to that heroism which has unfortunately converted the crimes of conquest into the most fascinating triumphs of mankind. It is a system which is directed against the first principle of social honour and happiness. It beats up for every bad, degrading, and dangerous passion of the human mind. It does not raise the open, manly standard of nation against nation, but in the cowardice of warfare, which dissolves its only enchantment, divides a nation against itself. It makes up an army of public crime and private discontent, of honest error and false opinion, of desperate vice and virtuous poverty driven to desperation. It sets the free victims of the laws to imprison and enslave the state; brings into the field against one another men whom the same land and the same fathers have bred, and which, instead of settling this horrible conflict by the cannon and the sword, the shortest cure for the miseries it has engendered, and extending no further than to the actual combatants, spreads wide the desolation by the flower weapons of jealousy and distrust, of terror and vengeance; scatters the land with disease and famine, and by the destruction of public credit, public confidence, and public opinion, destroys for the present, and puts to the die of chance hereafter the existence and even the name of a country."

When my subject is attended to, I have no apology to make for this digression. Indeed it can hardly be called one; because the facts which gave rise to it stand in their proper places as connected with the origin of the war against France, and because the reflections from them are not spontaneous, being dictated by public duty to the historian of such events.

The excesses which unfortunately distinguished the French revolution, soon after the proclamation, further favoured the system of antipathy against France, and the death of her unhappy monarch yet further ripened the plans of government already in agitation.

Before this memorable era there was a visible disposition in ministers to a rupture with France, but the sense of her situation inspired the French councils with a pru-

dence which disappointed it. Ministers had notoriously connived at, if not assisted in fomenting the conspiracy then forming throughout Europe; they had covertly libelled France in the proclamation which M. Chauvelin, by order from his court, had only mildly complained of; they had withdrawn Lord Gower from Paris; they had set on foot a correspondence between the secretary of state and her minister here in the most impious language, and upon complaints which she either disavowed, or to the removal of which she seemed to submit.

All these provocations were resisted by France, and the concessions which she made before and after our refusal to acknowledge her ambassador would scarcely be believed, if it did not remain on record in the correspondence as it was laid before the House of Commons by ministers themselves, to vindicate their conduct in dismissing M. Chauvelin, and to justify the war which it produced.

This correspondence is scarcely known to, or recollected by, the English public. Its authenticity is unquestionable, and the examination of it will place the authors of the war in their proper colours.

The mission of M. Chauvelin, as ambassador from the King of the French, commenced in the spring of 1792; and his first note, as appears by the correspondence with Lord Grenville, bears date the 12th of May in that year. It had for its object to explain to the court of Great Britain (as will appear by reference to it) the reasons which had determined France to a war with the Emperor.

It stated, in the name of the French King, that a great conspiracy had been formed in Europe against France to destroy her new constitution, which he had sworn to maintain, masking for a season the preparations of its designs by an insulting pity for his person and a zeal for his authority.

It set forth the remonstrances which he (the French King) had made upon the subject of this coalition, first to the Emperor Leopold, and afterwards to Francis, who succeeded him. He informed Great Britain, that it had at last been avowed, and a declaration made, that it should not cease "until France should remove the serious causes which had given rise to it." The note added, that this declaration had been accompanied with the assembling of troops upon all the frontiers of France, evidently

for the purpose of constraining her inhabitants to alter the form of the government they had chosen.

Having thus stated the causes of the war with the Emperor, the French King appealed to the British government for the justice of his cause; and, to remove all jealousies respecting this country which had been industriously circulated, Monsieur Chauvelin, in his name, and by his authority, further declared, "that whatever might be the fate of arms in that war, France rejected all ideas of aggrandisement; that she would preserve her liberty, her constitution, her unalienable right of reforming herself whenever she might think proper; that she never would allow other powers to nourish a hope of dictating laws to her. But that very pride, so natural and so just, was a sure pledge to all the powers from whom she should receive no provocation, not only of her constant pacific disposition, but also of the respect which France would shew at all times for the laws, the customs, and the forms of governments, of different nations."

As at this time much had been said of attempts made by France to produce disturbances in this country, the note further declared, "that the French King desired to have it known, that he would publicly and severely disavow all agents at foreign courts in peace with France, who should dare to depart an instant from that respect, either by fomenting or favouring insurrection against the established order, or by interfering in any manner whatever in the interior policy of such states, under pretence of a proselytism, which, exercised in the dominions of friendly powers, would be a real violation of the law of nations."

This note was dated, as I have observed, on the 12th of May, 1792. No answer was given to it, until the 24th of the same month, when Lord Grenville, passing by the causes of the war with the Emperor, declared, "that Great Britain, faithful to her engagements, would pay the strictest attention to preserve that good understanding which so happily subsisted between his Majesty and the Most Christian King." But notwithstanding this declaration, the royal proclamation had issued only three days before, and in the very interval between M. Chauvelin's note and this answer to it.

The proclamation, it is true, took no direct notice of France; and being an act of national police, France had,

in strictness, no right to complain of it. Yet the period of its issuing being so critical, M. Chauvelin repeated to Lord Grenville, the day afterwards, the assurances he had made on the 12th of May preceding; and in another letter, received by Lord Grenville in June, expressed himself as follows:

“ If certain individuals of this country have established a correspondence abroad, tending to excite troubles therein, and if, as the proclamation seems to insinuate, certain Frenchmen have come into their views, that is a proceeding wholly foreign to the French nation, to the legislative body, to the King, and to his ministers; it is a proceeding of which they are entirely ignorant, which militates against every principle of justice, and which, whenever it became known, would be universally condemned in France. Independently of those principles of justice, from which a free people ought never to deviate, is it not evident, from a due consideration of the true interests of the French nation, that she ought to desire the interior tranquillity, the continuance and the force of the constitution of a country which she already looks upon as her natural ally? Is not this the only reasonable wish which a people can form who fees so many efforts united against its liberty?

“ The minister plenipotentiary, deeply sensible of these truths, and of the maxims of universal morality upon which they are founded, had already represented them in an official note, which he transmitted to the British ministry the 15th of this month, by the express orders of his court: and he thinks it his duty to repeat, on the present occasion, the important declarations which it contains.”

In the month of July, when the vast confederacy begun in Europe was more visibly extending itself against France, M. Chauvelin, in the name of the French King, earnestly applied for the mediation of Great Britain upon the subject. After stating the public proceedings of the different nations, the note concluded as follows:

“ The steps taken by the cabinet of Vienna amongst the different powers, and principally amongst the allies of his Britannic Majesty, in order to engage them in a quarrel which is foreign to them, are known to all Europe. If public report even were to be credited, its successes at the court of Berlin prepare the way for others in the United

Provinces ; the threats held out to the different members of the Germanic body to make them deviate from that wise neutrality which their political situation, and their dearest interests, prescribe to them ; the arrangements taken with different sovereigns of Italy, to determine them to act hostilely against France ; and, lastly, the intrigues by which Russia has just been induced to arm against the constitution of Poland ; every thing points out fresh marks of a vast conspiracy against free states, which seems to threaten to precipitate Europe in universal war.

“ The consequences of such a conspiracy, formed by the concurrence of powers who have been so long rivals, will be easily felt by his Britannic Majesty : the balance of Europe, the independence of the different powers, the general peace, every consideration which at all times has fixed the attention of the English government, is at once exposed and threatened.

“ The King of the French presents these serious and important considerations to the solicitude and to the friendship of his Britannic Majesty. Strongly penetrated with the marks of interest and of affection which he has received from him ; he invites him to seek, in his wisdom, in his situation, and in his influence, means compatible with the independence of the French nation, to stop, whilst it is still time, the progress of that confederacy, which equally threatens the peace, the liberty, the happiness of Europe, and, above all, to dissuade from all accession to this project those of his allies whom it may be wished to draw into it, or who may have been already drawn into it from fear, seduction, and different pretexts of the falsest as well as of the most odious policy.”

This application was answered by Lord Grenville on the 8th of July, in which, after repeating former assurances of friendship towards France, and of a disposition to maintain the happy harmony which subsisted between the two empires, the proposed mediation was refused in the following words :

“ His Majesty will never refuse to concur in the preservation or re-establishment of peace between the other powers of Europe, by such means as are proper to produce that effect, and are compatible with his dignity, and with the principles which govern his conduct. But the

same sentiments which have determined him not to take a part in the internal affairs of France, ought equally to induce him to respect the rights and the independence of other sovereigns, and especially those of the allies ; and his Majesty has thought that, in the existing circumstances of the war now begun, the intervention of his councils, or of his good offices, cannot be of use, unless they should be desired by all the parties interested."

The same determination, not to interfere with the internal affairs of France, was repeated only a few days before M. Chauvelin was ordered to quit the kingdom, under the circumstances of direct interference which will presently appear to have attended his dismission : and the refusal to mediate with the Emperor for the restoration of peace was given but a short time before we involved Holland in the horrors of war, without being desired to intermingle in her affairs.

This proceeding, which terminated all hopes of tranquillity in Europe, furnishes the true cypher to explain every succeeding act of his Majesty's present councils. We shall find them uniformly and scrupulously observant of the most novel punctilio, which could furnish the smallest pretence for repelling peace, but overleaping every rule hitherto adopted by regular governments in seeking a justification for war.

Soon after this, the unhappy King of France was brought from Versailles, and deprived of the functions of government, and Lord Gower was recalled from Paris ; and M. Chauvelin was still continued by France at the court of London, although he was no longer acknowledged as her ambassador : a pretty strong proof that she was not then desirous of seeking a cause of quarrel.

Though M. Chauvelin was now in a manner a private man, yet the correspondence nevertheless continued with the secretary of state ; and it appears, by referring to it, that the charges made by this country to the conduct of France were principally these :

A meditated attack upon Holland, and at all events a violation of her rights, notwithstanding her neutrality, by the proceedings of the Convention respecting the Scheldt, and the opening a passage through it to attack the citadel of Antwerp ; the French invasion and possession of the Ne-

therlands, and the encouragement given to revolt in other countries, not only by emissaries in this country, but by the decree of the 19th of November, which contained a formal declaration to extend universally the new principles of government adopted in France, and to encourage revolt in all countries, even in those which were neutral.

M. Chauvelin had explained himself upon these subjects in the early part of the correspondence: but as his formal character of ambassador was then considered to be vacated, I purposely pass them over, because they were afterwards formally repeated, and nearly in the same words, when M. Chauvelin, in January 1793, presented his letters of credence from the executive council of France, the acceptance of which were formally refused by Lord Grenville.

In this note the executive council again in terms declared, "that France would respect the safety of all nations whilst they preserved their neutrality; that she had before renounced, and again renounced, every conquest; and that her occupation of the Low Countries should only continue during the war, and the time which might be necessary for the Belgians to consolidate their liberties; after which let them be happy, France would find her recompence in their felicity."

With regard to the Scheldt, she considered that as a matter between England and Belgium, as independent nations, upon the principle of her former declaration regarding that country, expressing herself thus:

"The executive council declares, not with a view of yielding to some expressions of threatening language, but solely to render homage to truth, that the French republic does not intend to erect itself into an universal arbitrator of the treaties which bind nations. She will know how to respect other governments, as she will take care to make her own respected. She does not wish to impose laws upon any one, and will not suffer any one to impose laws upon her. She has renounced, and again renounces every conquest; and her occupation of the Low Countries shall only continue during the war, and the time which may be necessary to the Belgians to insure and consolidate their liberty; after which let them be independent and happy, France will find her recompence in their felicity."

“ When that nation shall be found in the full enjoyment of liberty, when its general will can lawfully declare itself without shackles, then if England and Holland still attach some importance to the opening of the Scheldt, they may put the affair into a direct negociation with Belgium. If the Belgians, by any motive whatever, consent to deprive themselves of the navigation of the Scheldt, France will not oppose it; she will know how to respect their independence, even in their errors.”

The charge of encouraging sedition against governments she again repelled with indignation in the language of her former declarations on the subject, and disavowed the construction put upon the decree of the 19th of November, qualifying and explaining it as follows:

“ We have said, and we desire to repeat it, that the decree of the 19th of November could not have any application, unless to the single case in which the general will of the nation, clearly and unequivocally expressed, should call the French nation to its assistance and fraternit y. Sedition can certainly never be construed into the general will. These two ideas mutually repel each other, since a sedition is not, and cannot be any other than the movement of a small number against the nation at large; and this movement would cease to be seditious, provided all the members of a society should at once rise, either to correct their government, or to change its form in toto, or for any other object.

“ The Dutch were assuredly not seditious, when they formed the generous resolution of shaking off the yoke of Spain; and when the general will of that nation called for the assistance of France, it was not reputed a crime in Henry the Fourth, or in Elizabeth of England, to have listened to them. The knowledge of the general will is the only basis of the transactions of nations with each other; and we can only treat with any government whatever on this principle, that such a government is deemed the organ of the general will of the nation governed.

“ Thus, when by this natural interpretation the decree of the 19th of November is reduced to what it truly implies, it will be found that it announces nothing more than an act of the general will, and that beyond any doubt,

and so effectually founded in right, that it was scarcely worth the trouble to express it. On this account, the executive council thinks that the evidence of this right might, perhaps, have been dispensed with by the National Convention, and did not deserve to be made the object of a particular decree. But with the interpretation which precedes it, it cannot give uneasiness to any nation whatever."

Having adverted to all the material parts of the correspondence, I desire very distinctly to be understood, that I am not undertaking the justification of the conduct of France, at this period, though I shall ever think her "more sinned against than sinning." With regard to this decree of the 19th of November, no considerate person can justify it: because there is a great difference between one nation giving *particular assistance* to another which is oppressed by its government, as King William did to England, and a *general prospective declaration* such as is contained in the decree of the 19th of November, and which became more hostile to the peace of other nations, as being issued upon the eve of a great revolution which naturally affected the temper and feelings of mankind. Neither do I seek to maintain that England should have relied secure from the explanation of the other points in difference, as they are explained in this correspondence, much less that she should have relied upon the sincerity of them, or the durability of French councils, to give sincerity its effect. These are matters of fair political controversy, which I purposely avoid; but I hazard the assertion, that common policy and common sense absolutely enjoined that they should either have been made the instant foundations of war, as aggressions which admitted no settlement, or the subject of negotiation upon terms consistent with dignity and safety.

But, unfortunately, neither of these courses were pursued. We neither made war upon these aggressions, which might have led to a termination of it upon their removal, nor would we consent to put their removal into a train of amicable negotiation.

The letters of credence sent by the republic were refused, not because of these enumerated aggressions, or of any other, but because she was a republic; and in a few

days afterwards, Monsieur Chauvelin, who presented them, was also dismissed from the kingdom ; not because the answers of his government were declared unsatisfactory on the points objected to, but because the French monarchy had been finally terminated by the destruction of their King. On that account solely Monsieur Chauvelin was directed, on the 24th of January, 1793, to quit this kingdom ; the King having declared by the secretary of state, " That after such an event, his Majesty could no longer permit his residence here." And the communication of that order to the Parliament on the 28th of January following, expressly stated his dismissal to be " *on account of the late atrocious act perpetrated at Paris.*"

Before this period, France was, undoubtedly, solicitous for peace. She had done none of the acts complained of in the correspondence, until her independence had been threatened by a hostile confederacy. She had prayed the mediation of Great Britain to dissolve that confederacy, and to avert its consequences. She had disavowed conquest and aggrandizement ; and the only steps she had taken inconsistent with that declaration, were invasions of the territories of princes, confederating or confederated against her. She offered to respect the neutrality of Holland, and solemnly disavowed every act or intention to disturb the government of Great Britain.

This posture of things, which, if not wholly satisfactory, was certainly a posture for amicable and commanding settlement, the British government thus disturbed by an act which may be termed an interference with the internal government of France ; accompanied besides with what cannot well be denied to be an insult by those who maintain *that Lord Malmesbury was insulted.* Monsieur Chauvelin was dismissed from this kingdom, not as Lord Malmesbury was from France, because his terms of negotiation were inadmissible ; but because no intercourse *upon any terms* could be admitted to a nation which with cruelty or injustice had put her king to death. I am not justifying or extenuating the *regicide*—but what had this nation, *as a nation*, to do with it ? Would any one of those who, in considering it as a murder to be avenged by England, have been necessary to the deaths of above a million of innocent unoffending men, and to the misery

and devastation of Europe, venture now to consider it as a freih cause of hostilities, if all the crowned heads in Europe were to be cut off by their subjects? I believe not. Indeed such a cause of war has been since abandoned: but by what stages, upon what principles, and with what consequences, I shall examine hereafter.

In this state of things the king met the parliament on the 12th of December, 1792: when notwithstanding the conciliatory declarations detailed in the preceding correspondence " (to the whole of which parliament was still an entire stranger)," his Majesty was advised by his ministers to repeat the same three direct charges against France, which had been before made to her ambassador, and upon the footing of these complaints, without submitting the answers which had been given to them to the consideration of parliament, they called upon the country to enable them to augment our forces, and mixed in their address to the throne, but still more in the debates which led to it, a language of reproach and insult wholly unexampled in the proceeding of any public council to the government of an independent nation.

To save the country rushing down this precipice of ruin in the phrenzy of alarm, which every nerve of government had been strained to propagate, Mr. Fox, on the 15th of December, when the Speaker of the House of Commons had reported the King's answer to the address of the House, and whilst M. Chauvelin was yet in England, proposed, " That an humble address should be presented to his Majesty, praying that he would be pleased to appoint a minister to be sent to Paris to *treat with the persons exercising provisionally the functions of government in France, touching such points as might be in difference between his Majesty and his allies and the French nation.*"

At this time the French government had done no one act which even ministers themselves considered as a foundation for war; since war was not even proposed in the King's speech; but, on the contrary, the correspondence not then disclosed to the House, which was going on at this very period, continued to express the most pacific dispositions.

The proposition was therefore the most important in

point of matter, and the most critical in point of time, ever offered to the consideration of parliament, and it was made in a manner the most simple and affecting; afraid of irritating where the object was to persuade; and subdued by the dreadfully impending calamities, Mr. Fox put the rein upon that overpowering eloquence which so eminently distinguishes him, and in a very few, plain, unanswerable sentences, beseeched the House to try the effect of negotiation before steps were taken which would inevitably bring on hostilities: to prepare with vigour and firmness for war, but with prudence and gentleness to cultivate peace.

When this proposition was made, *the annexation of Belgium*, now the main obstacle to peace, was disavowed by France; and, as she was a suitor to us besides for our mediation with the Emperor, it is easy to see how sure the road was to its return to its former government. The security of Holland, whilst she preserved her neutrality, was professed, and in a manner guaranteed. The ancient limits of France were proposed as her dominion, and implicit respect was manifested to the independence and constitutions of other nations. Yet so irresistible was the force of delusion and infatuation, that Mr. Fox's proposition, though its object was to secure every thing whilst it conceded nothing, and though it came from a person long the favourite, and with all its leanings still the favourite of the House of Commons, yet it was received amidst almost universal bursts of disapprobation, scarcely indeed with the observances of parliamentary decorum. Some persons long attached to this great man, by friendship as well as opinion, seemed to forget their reverence for his talents and integrity, and one went the length of lamenting *even his former* political attachment to him.

For having made this proposition I will not vindicate Mr. Fox; his own eloquent and masterly vindication of it, his predictions too fatally accomplished, and the groans of a suffering world, bear awful testimony for him.

At the time this motion was made, the correspondence between Lord Grenville and M. Chauvelin being still kept back from the House of Commons, Mr. Fox himself did not know the additional foundations he had for his proposition; it rested upon his own wise forecast at the time he

made it; but, in a few days afterwards, the whole details were communicated by a message from the King*, and the late House of Commons found in the submissive propositions of France (*which they did not know of when they refused negotiating*) an additional justification for the war. They thanked his Majesty for his gracious communication, and pledged their lives and fortunes to support hostilities.

It is impossible not to pause here, for a moment, to contemplate the probable consequences, if we had attended to the counsels of this exalted and disinterested statesman at that critical and momentous period.

The regular governments of Europe, as if they were one power, surrounded Great Britain with unbroken force and resources; a confederacy which would have been infinitely more awful and commanding, if the principles of its union had only been a common security. Had Great Britain, the first amongst the nations, and enjoying herself a free constitution, accepted the offer of being the arbitres of the repose of Europe, with what a commanding voice might she have spoken to France whilst her factions were tearing one another to pieces, and her government could scarcely support itself during peace!

If, instead of inciting and encouraging the princes of Europe to invade France, for the purpose of dissolving her establishment, we had become her security against their invasions, whilst her revolution should be confined to her own limits and subjects, it is not possible to believe upon any reasoning from human life or experience, that Europe could have now been in its present condition. But if, instead of this *passive* and *merely preventive* influence, Great Britain, in the true spirit and in the full ripeness of civil wisdom, had felt a just and generous compassion for the sufferings of the French people; if, seeing them thirsting for liberty, but ignorant of the thousand difficulties which attend its establishment, she had taken a friendly, yet a commanding part; if, not contenting herself with a cold acknowledgment of the king of the French, by the insidious forms of an embassy, she had become the faithful, but at the same time the cautious protector of the first revolution; if she had put the rein upon Europe to prevent its

* See the King's message to the House of Commons, January 28th, 1793.

interference, instead of countenancing the confederacy of its powers against it, the unhappy Louis might now have been reigning, according to his oath, over a free people; the horrors of succeeding revolutions might have been averted, and much of that rival jealousy, the scourge of both nations for so many centuries, might, without affecting the happy balances of our mixed constitution, have been gradually and happily extinguished.

The powers that then existed in France, however insincere, or however unsettled in their authority, having professed the continuance of peace, and having asked our mediation with the Emperor, upon the renunciation of conquest and aggrandizement, and upon the disavowal of interference with the governments of other countries, *we should have taken them at their words.* The possible insincerity of the offer, or the weakness of perhaps an expiring faction to give it efficacy, would have only added to the predominancy of Great Britain. The magnanimous and beneficent conduct of a powerful nation possessing a free government, admitting the right of another nation to be free, offering its countenance to *rational* freedom, lamenting the departure from its true principles, and demanding only security against its influence to disturb herself, would have been irresistible in its effects. Amidst the tyrannies of quick succeeding factions, the united force of this country and her allies exerted upon such a sound principle, and thrown into the scale of any party in France that might have been willing to preserve the peace, would have given to that party an over-ruling ascendancy.

This is so true, that we know the share which even Brissot had in the commencement of hostilities, amidst all the provocations to them, was the principal cause of his destruction, and the root of Robespierre's popularity, which enabled him to become the tyrant of France. Nothing, indeed, could have withstood, in the sentiments of that nation, the striking and salutary contrast between being left to the consolidation of her own constitution, without any obstacle but the vices and passions of her own subjects, and the wilful provocation of the whole civilized world encompassing her territories with a force apparently sufficient to crush to pieces her establishment, even

if it had not been tottering upon its own basis from internal causes.

But supposing the practicability, or the effects of such a system in Great Britain to be altogether false and visionary; admitting, for the sake of argument, that the agitation of the French Revolution was too violent, and its principles, from the very beginning, too disorganising and mischievous for regular governments, under any restraints, to have intermeddled with or even acknowledged, nothing would follow from the admission in favour of the war; because a sincere yet armed neutrality on the part of Europe would have been the surest and the most obvious course for dissolving the new republic, or, at all events, of recalling it the soonest to some social order of things.

France was at that time (according to the authors of the war) torn to pieces by the most furious and nearly balanced factions, which made her government a mere phantom, competent only to evil, and incapable of good. Be it so.—For that very reason we should have observed the most perfect, and even the most soothing neutrality. Heterogeneous bodies, having no principle of union capable of constituting a substance, and which, if left to themselves, would separate and disperse, may be bound together by external force, and passed through the furnace till they unite and incorporate. This was precisely the case with France. She was rent asunder by the internal divisions of her own people, but cemented again by the conspiracy of kings. Her great leaders were banded against each other, not only from the most deadly hatred and the lust of dominion, but separated by the most extravagant zeal for contradictory theories of government, whilst the people were tossed to and fro, the alternate victims of repugnant and desolating changes. In this unexampled crisis, persons, capable upon other occasions of judging with accuracy and acuteness, were looking by every mail for the utter destruction of the French government; but they had lost the clue to the mystery, or rather to the plain principle which preserved it: the British minister was the guardian angel that hovered over France, and the sole creator of her ominous and portentous strength. The necessity of resisting by combination the external war with which he surrounded her, counteracted

the separation arising from her internal commotions. It raised up a proud, warlike, and superior spirit, at the call of national independence, too strong for the inferior spirits, whose enchantments were dissolving her as a nation ; and by the operation of the simplest principles of unalterable and universal nature, rather than from any thing peculiar in the characteristic of Frenchmen, consolidated her mighty republic, and exhibited a career of conquest and glory unequalled in the annals of mankind.

In the same manner the cruel confiscations and judicial murders, which, under the same tyrannies destroying one another, disgraced the earlier periods of the republican revolution, may be mainly ascribed to the same predominant causes. If France had been left by other nations to the good or evil of her own changes, the proscriptions which prevailed for a long season could not have existed in the same extent in any civilised nations, nor even in a nation of human beings : but the reign of terror (as it was well called) must be always a reign of blood, because there is no principle of the human mind so mean or so merciless as fear. In proportion, therefore, as the government of France was shaking by external conspiracies, and trembling for its existence, it became of course more subject to internal agitation by the revolts of its own subjects. Had it not therefore been for our unhappy interference, royalists of the old school, and royalists of the monarchial revolution, bending before the storm of national opinion, and seeing no great standard hoisted for their protection, would have really or seemingly acquiesced in the new order of things ; they would have given little offence or jealousy to the state, and, what is far more important, the state itself, unimpelled by the terrors of revolt and the expences of war, would not have had the same irresistible motives for seizing upon the persons and property of its subjects ; and thus numerous classes of men, possessing dignities and property, which have been chased from their country, or swept off the face of the earth, would have remained within the bosom of France, inactive, indeed, for the present, but whose silent and progressive influence hereafter might have greatly affected the temper, if not the form of the government, at no very distant period.

This was precisely the case in England upon the death of Charles the First: the nobles and great men of the realm submitted to the protectorship of Cromwell, and Europe acquiesced in it. Cromwell, therefore, executed his authority according to the new forms, but without any system of proscription. The high men of the former period continued to exist, and with all the influences of property, which remained with its ancient possessors; the monarchy might, therefore, be said to have been rather in abeyance than abolished, and when the return of Charles was planned and executed, every thing stood in its place, and conspired to favour his restoration. But if the nations of Europe had then unsuccessfully combined to restore monarchy in England, as they have lately to restore it in France, the consequences would have been exactly similar. The monarchical party in England would have undoubtedly flocked to the standard: they would have endeavoured by force, or by intrigue, to dissolve the commonwealth; those who were taken would have been executed as traitors; others would have been driven out of England as emigrants; their great estates would have passed into other hands; a title to them would have been made by the new government to those who, as in France, became the creditors of the public during an exhausting war; the whole body of nobility and great landed proprietors would have perished in England; and Charles the Second could no more have landed at Dover than Louis the Eighteenth could offer himself before Calais at this moment.

It may be asked, why the sagacity of that arch statesman Cromwell did not foresee the consequences I have appealed to? and the application of my whole argument is concluded, and becomes invulnerable by the answer. The answer is—he could not do it. The powers of Europe and his own subjects, through their interference, did not furnish him with the occasion. Neither in England, nor in France, nor in any other country, will men bear bloody murders, or cruel confiscations, but under the pressure of some actual or apparent necessity to form the tyrant's plea. This plausible and unfortunate plea was given by confederated Europe, but principally by England, to the tyrants of France; and thus the Republic became not only consolidated for the present, but the return of such a

state of things was inevitably prevented, as might have led to a restoration in France like that which followed the commonwealth in England.

In the first stages of the revolution, the French people, like the English in the last century, had no interest in their government more solid, nor more permanent, than the theories which had given it birth. The French Republic, therefore, like the English commonwealth, had but a precarious and doubtful foundation. But how stands it now, in consequence of our unprincipled and impolitic interference? It stands upon a rock.—It exists no longer from force, but from will. It depends no longer upon opinion, but leans upon interest; and not merely upon that general interest, which, after a state of great agitation, naturally inclines a nation to rest, but upon a particular and individual interest universally spread. The very existence of all classes of the people now depends wholly upon the power and the continuance of the state. There is scarcely any property in France, real or personal, which, in the hands of the present possessors, has any other foundation. There is no ancient undisputed possession of land, which has ever been a title in most changes of human governments: there is no money, which may be buried till the storm is overblown. On the contrary, the land is almost universally held by the public creditors against the former possessors, either under a sale from the government, or as a pledge for money lent to it; and the paper currency of the nation (which is its personal estate) may, without loss to the proprietors, be torn into a thousand pieces, unless the Republic continues to be *one and indivisible*.

In the very point in difference at this moment, which stands as a stumbling block in the way of peace, the force of this important truth may speedily be made manifest. With all the influence of the British minister, he cannot probably continue the war for any long season on the score of Belgium; and for this plain reason, the interest which the public ought to take in its separation from France, bears no rational proportion to the price at which it must be purchased through war, supposing the event to be even certain. The people therefore will speedily murmur; and as Mr. Pitt must either abandon Belgium or his situation, it is easy to anticipate the election he will make. France?

on the other hand, will find fewer difficulties with her subjects. The wisdom of ministers has provided against it. Belgium, through the necessities of war, has been pledged to the public creditor, and the surrender of it upon any principle short of a necessity which supersedes all choice, would be a surrender of the very existence of her republic.

I am not defending France ; I am stating her actual situation, her views, and her capacities, and am endeavouring to trace them to their original and obvious causes.

But it was a contest, it seems, to save religion and its holy altars from profanation and annihilation. Of all the pretences by which the abused zeal of the people of England has been hurried on to a blind support of ministers, this alarm for the Christian religion is the most impudent and preposterous. How it could succeed, for a moment, in an enlightened age, and with a nation of Christians, will probably be considered hereafter as one of the most remarkable events which has distinguished this age of wonders.

Before this discovery of the present ministers, who had ever heard of the Christianity of the French court, and its surrounding nobles, towards whom the hurricane of revolution was principally directed ? Who had ever heard of their evangelical characters so as to lead to apprehension that Christianity must be extinguished with their extinction ? Who that ever really professed the Christian religion, from the times of the apostles to the present moment, ever before considered it as a human establishment, the work of particular men or nations, subject to decline with their changes, or to perish with their falls ? No man ever existed who is more alive to every thing connected with the Christian faith than the author of these pages, or more unalterably impressed with its truths ; but these very impressions deprive me of any share in that anxious concern of the cabinet at St. James's for the preservation of religion, which was going to ruin, it seems with the fall of the gross superstitions and abominable corruptions of the priesthood and monarchy of France. Weak men, not to have remembered, before they disturbed the repose of the world by their pious apprehensions, that the fabric of Christianity was raised in direct opposition to all

the powers and establishments of the world, and that we have the authority of God himself, that all the nations of the earth shall be finally gathered together under its shadow. Rash men, not to have reflected before they embarked in this crusade of desolation, that however good may be attained through evil, in the mysterious system of Divine Providence, it is not for man to support that religion, which commands peace and good will upon earth, by a deliberate and deep laid system of bloodshed, famine, and devastation. I by no means intend to inculcate by these observations, that, because Christianity, if it be founded in truth, must ultimately prevail over all opposition, that therefore Christian nations, or Christian individuals, are absolved from their activities in its defence, or in its propagation. In this, as in all other human dispensations, the Supreme Being acts by means that are human, and our duties are only exalted instead of being weakened by this awful consideration: but these duties, whilst they serve to quicken our zeal in what is good, can in no instance involve us in what is evil. They dignify that piety which propagates the gospel by Christian charities, but condemn that rashness which would establish or extend it by force.

This condemnation, from the very essence of Christianity, must fall even upon honest error asserting its dominion by the sword: but if the condemnation should ever happen to range more widely, so as to involve ambition, dealing coldly in blood, for its own scandalous purposes, under the garb of meekness and truth. I dare not admit into my mind even an idea of the punishment which ought to follow. I would rather from humanity invoke the patience of God and man, than invite or direct their vengeance.

The pretence of a war waged against opinions to check, as it was alledged, the contagion of their propagation, is equally senseless and extravagant. The same reason might equally have united all nations, in all times, against the progressive changes which have conducted nations from barbarism to light, and from despotism to freedom. It ought indissolubly to have combined the catholic kingdoms to wage eternal war, till the principles of the reformation, leading to a new civil establishment, had been

abandoned. It should have kept the sword unsheathed until the United Provinces returned to the subjection of Spain, until King William's title and the establishment of the British revolution had given way to the persons and prerogatives of the Stuarts, and until Washington, instead of yielding up the cares of a republican empire to a virtuous and free people, in the face of an admiring and astonished world, should have been dragged as a traitor to the bar of the Old Bailey, and his body quartered upon Tower Hill.

All these changes were alike in their turns calumniated and reprobated, and fought with by the abuses which they disgraced and trampled on. Time has now placed in the shade the arguments and the deeds by which wisdom and valour triumphed: they are there only viewed by learning and retirement, which enables cowardice and folly, by artifices formerly defeated, the easier to impose upon a busy or an unthinking world.

But it is maintained, that independent of the general interest of all nations to suppress irreligion and anarchy, the existence of the French revolution had a direct and immediate bearing on the security of the *British government*; that the political principles which of old divided the country, and formed a salutary opposition to the crown, had taken an entirely new and dangerous direction; that the first principles of our mixed and balanced government were held up to derision and reproach; that the privileged orders of the state were mocked and insulted; whilst the reign of liberty, under a republican form, was anticipated with enthusiasm by large classes of the people.

Without at all admitting this to have been the case in the extent contended for, and relying, as I have already done, upon the judgements of our solemn tribunals for the refutation of it; yet, for the sake of the argument, assuming it to be true, I am again utterly at a loss to discover what is gained from the admission by the advocates for the war. Such a disposition in any considerable classes of the people might have called for particular prudence in government, and might have justified particular exertions of police. It might, in the honest opinion of many, have been a strong argument against yielding to any reforms at that particular moment; it might have suggested some re-

serves in the communications with France, even in times of peace, during the crisis of her political explosion; and it might have justified vigorous prosecutions, carried on in the spirit and according to the practice of the laws. But I demand of the returning reason of the country, how the apprehended danger from the contagion of opinions could possibly be averted by War, or by the concomitant measures which were an inseparable part of the system? Were the forms of our free government likely to be better reconciled to the minds of alienated subjects by depriving them of the actual substance of freedom, which it is the object of all governments to secure? If they were discontented with the English constitution, was it likely that an attack upon the rights of juries, the alteration of the sacred laws of King Edward the Third, and the suspension of the act of Habeas Corpus, would bring them back to their former zeal and admiration of it? If a contempt for their representatives was the crime imputed to them, and a disposition to invade their authority was the danger to be averted, was it the wisest course to erect the House of Commons into a grand jury to find capital bills of indictment for the crown against the people, and to prejudge their causes by publishing the accusing evidence under the crushing weight of their authority? If the aristocratic part of the state was unhappily losing its due estimation in popular opinion, was it prudent, at that particular moment, to destroy all that was venerable in the peerage, from ancient dignities and names of renown in the best times of England, by filling the House of Lords with the proprietors of contemptible boroughs without even a pretence of public service; and advancing to high titles, over the heads of the most ancient peers in the kingdom, men familiar to our recollection in very subordinate situations, marked during their whole lives by their servile dependence upon all ministers, and odious to the people from their notorious attachment to arbitrary principles of government? If it be possible to add to this climax of folly, was it reasonable to expect, that by rushing blindly into war, and thereby imposing the inevitable necessity of new taxes to an incalculable amount, we should purge away the spleen which the very weight of taxes had notoriously engendered? Lastly, was it the right course to escape from the conse-

quences of French opinions, when we knew to a certainty that it was not from the opinions with which we were to fight, but from that very system of war and taxation that we were pursuing, as a remedy for disaffection, that the French monarchy struck upon the rock of revolution?

I desire only to be respected or despised, to be considered as a man of common sense or a madman, as *the fair public voice of England is even now prepared to answer these questions.*

The cause of this bold appeal to an enlightened country is obvious. If the question be asked, in what the excellence of every human government must consist; the answer from civilized man throughout the world must be invariable and universal. It is that which secures the ends of civil society with the fewest restraints and at the least expence. This is undoubtedly *true government*. This is that system of rule and order in society, existing by express or tacit consent, however it may have at first begun, or by whatever progress it may have become established, which secures the greatest number of benefits and enjoyments, and which secures them permanently; which imposes the fewest possible restraints beyond those which a sound, moral, and a wise police ought to suggest in every country, and which leaves the subject in full possession of all that industry or harmless chance can bring along with them, subject only to the ordinary internal expences of a frugal government, and the extraordinary contributions, to secure its preservation and independence. This was once the emphatical description of the English government, but it is insensibly ceasing to be so; not that the constitution is lost; but that its inestimable object is in the course of being sacrificed to a false and pretended zeal for its preservation. Taxation, as I have just observed, is the universal price which must universally be paid as a security for a national establishment; but there are limits to every thing; if by rash and unnecessary wars, and by a venal system of expenditure, even in times of peace the revenue gets to the point which, *without instant repentance and reformation*, is fast approaching; the nation (by which I mean the great mass and body of the people) can have no longer any possible interest in the defence or preservation of their government; for if this system of finance is per-

listed in, what has government in the end to secure; Not the property of the people derived from their industry, but the property of the public creditor, to whom that industry is pledged; and thus all the majesty and dignity of the state may degenerate into a mere machinery, necessary to protect the legalized incumbrance by further burdens on the subject, whose labour and existence are mortgaged. In such a situation, a government may too late discover its error and insecurity; because the very zeal of the higher orders which encourages it in its extravagance, is, upon the first principle of human nature, an inducement to the lower orders to revolt. Adverting to this awful consideration, I have been shocked in the extreme at the late ostentatious triumph of the loan by subscription. Very many persons, I am persuaded, have subscribed to it from real motives of public spirit, and their exertion was a most seasonable and critical relief to the state; but passing by the condition to which ministers have reduced their country, when public spirit may be really manifested towards a government by a loan which would conduct a private lender to a prison as an usurer, what must be the reflections of the middle classes and the labouring poor of England upon the facility of taxation, which this sort of patriotism produces? The rich lend their money at ten per cent. but the public industry is mortgaged for the payment of the interest, and every article of consumption is already almost beyond the reach of the artificer and husbandman, screwed up as they are in proportion as they happen to come within the vortex of this accumulating revenue.

To what length this system may extend without a great public calamity, I purposely avoid discussing; but the support given by the delusion of the higher classes of the public to a system of measures at once so weak and so destructive, so unjust to the people, and so destructive to themselves, posterity, if not the present generation, may have occasion to lament in unavailing sackcloth. The danger to the monied interest and the proprietors of the funds, by the present unexampled expenditure, is certainly the most prominent and imminent. A danger which they have themselves provoked, and which is becoming critical by their own infatuation. But the proprietors of lands would do well to recollect also that their situation is scarcely pre-

rable. The war could neither have been begun nor continued to this hour, if the great representatives of the landed interest had not supported the ministers who projected it ; and I cannot believe that the people of Great Britain, whose fortunes depend upon public credit, or her Parliament representing that people, will ever consent either to a bankruptcy or to any insolvent composition with the government, without a process, which in the horrors of revolution would be a disgraceful confiscation ; but which in the legal reformations, imposed by necessity and justice upon the councils of a moral and intelligent people, would teach every distinct class and order of mankind, that their interests are inseparably interwoven with the interest of the whole community ; and that they must always bear their contingent in the final settlement of a national account.

Amongst the public supporters in Parliament of these measures I am complaining of, and amongst the higher classes of men, who with equal zeal have privately supported them, I know there are many, very many persons of the first honour, of the clearest integrity, and the best general sense, however misguided upon this particular subject. Indeed, it is a matter of great comfort to me to believe, as I do most firmly, that notwithstanding the wide range of luxury and corruption, the nation is enlightened and virtuous. I desire, indeed, to fasten personal ignominy or reproach upon no individual, public or private. I leave every man's motives to his own conscience, and to Him who alone can search them. But these concessions, which private honour and public decency alike exact from me, leave me nevertheless in full possession of the privilege of a British subject, which I shall fearlessly proceed to exercise, by charging the full, exclusive, and constitutional responsibility of all consequences upon those ministers who have officially advised and conducted the measures which produced them.

To estimate rightly the extent of this responsibility, let us look at the comparative condition of Great Britain, if even fortitude and patience can bear to look at it, had the present war been avoided by prudent councils ; and if the one hundred millions of money absolutely thrown away upon it, or even half of that sum had been raised by

a vigorous and popular administration for the reduction of the national debt. Fancy can hardly forbear to indulge in such a renovating scene of prosperity ; a scene which unhappily it is now her exclusive and melancholy privilege to resort to.

We should have seen a moral, ingenuous, and industrious people, consenting to an increase of burdens to repair the errors of their forefathers, and to ward off their consequences from crushing their posterity ; but enjoying under the pressure of them the virtuous consolation, that they were laying the foundation of a long career of national happiness ; seeing every relaxed and wearied sinew of the government coming back to its vigour, not by sudden rest, which is an enemy to convalescence, but by the gradual diminution of the weight which overpressed them. Observing new sources of trade and manufacture bursting forth like the buds of the spring, as the frosts of winter are gradually chased away, and seeing with pride and satisfaction, in the hands of a wise and frugal government, a large and growing capital for the refreshment of all its dependencies. To encourage and to extend marine establishments, our only real security against the hour when ambition might disturb the repose of nations. To give vigour to arts and manufactures, by large rewards and bounties. To feed and to employ the poor, by grand and extensive plans of national improvement. To remove by degrees the pressure of complicated revenue, and with it the complicated and galling penalties inseparable from its collection. To form a fund, to bring justice within the reach and to the very doors of the poor, and, by a large public revenue at the command of the magistracy, to ward off the miseries, the reflection of which, under the best system of laws in the world, and under their purest administration, have wrung with frequent sorrow the heart of the writer of these pages. And, finally, to enable this great, benevolent, and enlightened country, with a more liberal and exhaustless hand, to advance in her glorious career of humanizing the world, and spreading the lights of the gospel to the uttermost corners of the earth. All these animating visions are, I am afraid, fled for ever. It will be happy now if Great Britain, amidst the sufferings and distresses of her inhabitants, can maintain her present

trade, and preserve, even with all its defects, her present inestimable constitution.

Having shewn the origin of the war, and the exertions made by the small minority in Parliament, I now proceed to expose to the nation the blindness and obstinacy with which it was pursued; in spite of a series of the most favourable opportunities to terminate it with advantage in the beginning, and in defiance afterwards of a chain of events in rapid and disastrous succession, which manifested the utter impracticability of the objects for which it was persevered in. I will do this from a short review of the principal proceedings of Parliament upon the subject which speak for themselves; their existence cannot be denied, nor their contents misrepresented with effect. I select those of the House of Commons, not only because I was personally present at most of them, but because they are notoriously the foundation of all the transactions of government.

Hostilities had scarcely been commenced, when the subject was again brought before the House of Commons by Mr. Grey; a gentleman who has justly endeared himself to his country by his able indefatigable exertions throughout every stage of this extraordinary conjuncture, and who has secured to himself the well-earned fame of a most accomplished orator, and, what is better, of an honest statesman, in times of unexampled profligacy and corruption.

On the 21st of February, 1793, Mr. Grey proposed an address to the King, exposing the misconduct of his ministers in plunging the nation into war without any adequate necessity, and lamenting the pretexts by which its popularity was promoted, in surprising the humanity of Englishmen into measures which their deliberate judgments would condemn, and by influencing their most virtuous sensibilities into a blind and furious zeal for a war of vengeance. The conclusion "implored his Majesty to seize the most immediate opportunity of putting a stop to the hostilities which threatened all Europe with the greatest calamities."

No other answer was given to this seasonable proposition, than that the House had already and recently decided upon the question; and not only no step was taken

to open the way to negotiation, but, on the contrary, *after many other fruitless attempts towards the same object*, his Majesty's ministers, at the opening of the following session, on the 21st of January 1794, with greater sincerity than has in general characterised their proceedings, boldly and plainly avowed the principle on which the war had been begun, and was to be prosecuted, *viz.* "To oppose that wild and destructive system of rapine, anarchy, impiety, and irreligion; the effects of which, as they had been manifested in France, furnished a dreadful but useful lesson to the present age and posterity." This was the avowed principle of continuing the war, as appears by a reference to his Majesty's speech*. Not a word was said upon the footing of territory and conquest, although all the Austrian Netherlands had then been reduced under the government of the Emperor, although Mentz had been re-captured, and soon after Valenciennes, Conde, and Quesnoy, taken; and although Holland had been delivered from an impending invasion.

Under these circumstances, so favourable for the negotiation, so critical for terminating the war on terms advantageous to England and her allies, (*if it had proceeded upon any rational intelligible foundation*), not only no motion was made towards an amicable arrangement, but a principle of hostilities was thus openly developed, which wholly and absolutely precluded the return of peace.

This declaration of ministers, as contained in the King's speech, was the more striking and extraordinary, as it directly refuted their own unfounded assertion, that the war had proceeded from France. Mr. Pitt had continued to assert in parliament, long after the dismission of Chauvelin, "that the King had still left the door open to negotiation and amicable adjustment;" yet no sooner was the war begun, than its continuance was avowed and supported upon a principle, which shewed that peace could, under no concessions of France, have been preserved. For as the war was to be waged to subdue principles and opinions; to change the government and not to punish overt acts of insult; or to enforce restitution; it is plain, "that the door had never been left open at all," as the minister

* Vide the King's Speech, 21st January, 1794.

had pretended, since France was precisely in the same state at this moment as when M. Chauvelin was ordered to quit the kingdom: and if the return of peace was at the opening of the session declared to be inadmissible, whilst the principles of her government continued, it follows, that the original preservation of peace must have been equally inadmissible, whatever concessions might have been made by France to preserve it; since the self-same system existed at the commencement of the war, which was now pronounced to be an insuperable obstacle to negociation. I hope the time is now arrived, or at least is rapidly arriving, when the calm common sense of the country will detect such palpable duplicity.

This new and fatal principle of hostility was rendered still more clear from the posture of the debate upon the address; which was led, on the part of the government, by the Earl of Mornington, in a very able and complicated speech, the result of much thought and labour, and delivered with great force. It was afterwards published as a sort of creed of ministers upon the subject of the war. Towards the conclusion of this speech, as far as I could hear distinctly from the enthusiastic approbation which the sentiment produced, it contained these expressions: "That whilst the present, or any Jacobin government continued in France, no proposition for peace could be received or proposed by England." I forbear to remark upon the fallacy of the means by which this stout proposition was justified; time has unfortunately been beforehand with me upon the subject; events have already trampled upon the principles, and refuted the calculations.

Upon this occasion the Minister, the House, and the Nation, received another solemn warning from Mr Fox, against the phrenzy of thus pursuing a contest big with the most ruinous consequences, *without any defined or definable object*. This extraordinary man, summoning up all the mighty powers of his capacious mind, in a speech of unparalleled depth, comprehension, and eloquence, detailed the inevitable consequences of such a proceeding: he predicted the future consolidation of France from our very efforts to destroy her: he anticipated the dissolution of a confederacy cemented by no intelligible principle of common interest: he looked forward to the defection of

fome, to the subjugation of others, and with a too prophetic pencil (would to God he had been permitted to expunge the scene again by his own councils !) painted the melancholy and disastrous state to which his country would in the end be reduced, and which I assert to be nearly her condition at this moment. Left almost single as we are upon the theatre of war—asking for peace, but asking for it in vain, upon terms which without war were not only within our reach to obtain, but left to us to dictate—asking for peace in France under the pressure of a necessity created by our own folly—asking it of the regicide Directory, whose existence (I appeal to Mr. Burke and Lord Fitzwilliam) was pronounced to be perpetual war. Silent upon the subject of religion, without any atonement to its violated altars—and seeking by a thousand subterfuges and artifices unworthy of a great nation (and which must and will certainly be unsuccessful) to restore peace without humbling the pride of the ministers who provoked the war, by consenting to terms which nothing but their own imbecility could have raised France to the condition of offering, or have reduced England to the mortification of accepting*.

In order to relieve the country from the horrible condition of thus waging a war without a defined object, and consequently without a prospect of termination, Mr. Grey, on the 26th of January, 1795, made a motion “ to declare it to be the opinion of the House of Commons, that the existence of the present government of France ought not to be considered as a precluding at that time a negotiation for peace.”

At this time his Majesty’s ministers had begun to open their eyes to the improbability of restoring the French Monarchy, or, indeed, any monarchical establishment in France, and had begun to see also the danger of being pledged to war during the existence of her republican constitution. For although Mr. Grey’s proposition had been distinctly stated, and as clearly and distinctly accepted for debate by the minister, as if it had been an issue fram-

* A motion for peace was also made in the House of Lords, on the 17th of February, by the Marquis of Lansdown, supported by a most enlightened and convincing speech upon the rotteness of that confederacy which has since fallen to pieces.

ed by lawyers for judicial decision, yet on the day of the motion he fled from the discussion thus tendered and received, and interposed the following dexterous, but disastrous, amendment—" Declaring the determination of the House to support the King in the prosecution of the just and necessary war, and praying his Majesty to employ the resources of the country to prosecute it with vigour and effect *until a pacification could be effected on just and honourable terms with any government of France capable of maintaining the accustomed relations of peace and amity with other countries.*"

The object of this amendment which the late House of Commons adopted is almost too plain for commentary. The minister, unable to justify an absolute refusal of negotiation *upon any terms* with the existing French government, but being resolved not to negotiate *for the present*, nor to pledge himself to any *future* period when he would negotiate, nor to any distinct principles or circumstances by which he might stand in any degree pledged at any time upon the subject, had recourse to the absolutely *general* terms of his own amendment to evade Mr. Grey's proposition. What sort of government it was, or might be, which should create or secure this capacity of maintaining *the relations of amity* he reserved for his own single determination, to be afterwards exercised just as it might suit his convenience from the contingencies of adversity or success. If success attended the war, he might continue to deny the capacity of preserving amity, and pursue the system of subjugation or utter extermination ; whilst on the other hand, if the adversity foretold to him overtook him, he might recede from his haughty pretensions without inconsistency or humiliation, and, without any change of the principles to be subdued by war, declare the return of a social and civil capacity of his own mere creation.

If this transaction, pregnant with so many dangers, were not thus authenticated by the very Journals of Parliament, the historian who should venture to transmit it to future times would scarcely find credit for his narration.

We see a mighty and warlike nation, with a population of twenty-five millions of souls situated too at our very doors, and with which therefore sooner or later we must either cultivate a friendly intercourse, or live in a per-

petual state of warfare; we see such a community put with a single stroke of the pen out of the pale and communion of civilized nations. We see her (whilst, strange to tell! peace was avowed to be our object) branded in the face of all Europe as a standing plague, abomination, and reproach, not upon any recent act of aggression or insult, nor upon any actual or alledged resistance to propositions of peace and amity from ourselves or from other nations, but only upon this arrogant and insulting pretext of a polite incapacity wholly and purposely undefined.

By this unparalleled procedure, the French nation, instead of being drawn insensibly back to the humane and social order from which the paroxysms of her revolution had diverted her—instead of being at once awed by and reconciled to Great Britain, from seeing her pursuing a system active only as it regarded her own security, but in all other respects neutral, and even complacent, she has been brought to a temper of rooted jealousy and disgust: and, as an animal pursued beyond the ordinary course for which its common powers and instincts are bestowed, rises to a pitch of sagacity, strength, and boldness, which the natural historian can take no account of,—so France, thus baited and insulted, thus surrounded by nations with the arm of death lifted against her, has equally put at fault the ordinary calculations of national exertions, and brought this rash and dangerous minister to a state of repentance unfortunately too late for his country.

The charge which this transaction establishes against him is of the most serious and heavy complexion. We are now desired by this very minister to raise the cry against the ambition of France; against her insolent demeanour on the subject of peace, and her contempt of the balances which treaties have established in Europe. If to obey this call would serve the interests of my country, I shouold think it a pious fraud to burn these pages, and to join in the abuse. But as railing at our enemies will neither conciliate nor subdue them, it is fit to recollect that the insolence of her deportment has been dictated, if not justified, by *our own*. It is the British minister who has enabled France to hold a language which it may not, perhaps, be in our power to silence; and which, under

similar circumstances, would be the universal language of man from the Pole to the Equator, if French principles, French opinions, and French revolution, had never existed in the world.

Every people, so absurdly and impolitely outraged, would hold this language to us:—You, who now from no justice or good-will towards us, but under the pressure of a necessity created by yourselves, present yourselves at Paris with the balance of Europe in your hands, which you call upon us to respect; you were the first to break it to pieces for our destruction. You expunged us even from amongst the nations whose aggregate compose that Europe you would thus adjust and balance: and you invited all the nations, which should be poised in its scales for common security, to put themselves together into one scale to crush and overwhelm us. In the resistance of this unprincipled conspiracy, and for our own security against its effects, we have seized upon the territories of the principal conspirator, and we will preserve them as a barrier against the dangers we have surmounted, which, under other circumstances, might have been fatal. You now talk to us of your treaty with this Emperor, and we have no right to question the merit of that fidelity which binds you to each other. If you agreed not to lay down the sword but by common consent, it is not for France to argue Great Britain into a breach of her obligations. But what have we to do with the terms of a treaty between the Emperor and England which had our utter destruction as a nation for its foundation; and if, as you assert, (perhaps with reason) that it is inadmissible for France to set up the annexation of Belgium, and the demands of *her constitution* as a bar to the proposed retrocession, it is no less inadmissible for Great Britain to set up *her own treaties* with belligerent nations made without the consent of France, and made only for her destruction, as *her* ultimatum for the restoration of the peace which *she* proposes.

Would to God this were the language of speculation only—if it were so, it should not be publicly mine—but it is the actual language of the councils of France, as will appear more distinctly in the sequel—as against ministers it is an argument of weight; but I hope to shew hereafter, that under other councils it never could have been held,

and would not even now be held in the same extent or in the same temper against the British nation in its old, simple, manly, and august character of freedom.

Ministers cannot hereafter be sheltered from the responsibility of these proceedings upon the plea of inadvertency or mistake. Their danger and impolicy, and their certain effect to produce the very conjuncture we are at this moment placed in, was insisted on before the late Parliament in both Houses in a series of motions, one after another, during two whole sessions, conducted with such great abilities, and supported by such obvious policy, that though they had no effect within doors, they wrought an insensible effect upon the public, which, mixed with the distresses of the war, and the impracticability of its object, convinced the minister that his pretensions must at last be abandoned, and led him, amidst the struggles of obstinacy and necessity, to pursue that system of management, duplicity, and evasion, which has placed us, at length, in our present situation.

On the 6th of February, 1795, Mr. Grey moved a resolution, that without presuming to dictate or to suggest the time, nor the mode, nor the lines of negotiation, only sought to remove the formal obstacle by the acknowledgment of a power in France competent to negotiate ; " and appealing for that competency not only to the universal principles on which all nations had ever acted towards each other, but to the practice and experience of the United States of America, and of several powers of Europe in amity with the French republic."

This resolution was considered by the minister to be in substance the same which had been made in the January preceding, and was disposed of accordingly by the previous question. But Mr. Wilberforce, member for Yorkshire, struck I must suppose by the unanswerable principle and moderation of the proposition, divided with the minority ; declaring that the language in the address to his Majesty's speech, and on various other occasions having held out to the French, that we would not treat with their present rulers, it was fit that that insurmountable obstacle to peace should immediately be removed. And that as the latter part of the resolution had no other object, he should give it his support.

I mention this circumstance, because it proves to a demonstration, that independently of all terms of negotiation, the incapacity of France to negotiate continued to be the ruling principle of the war.

That the session might not pass away, leaving the affairs of the public in a condition so unexampled as especially, as it was plain from a thousand circumstances, that before Parliament could re assemble, the condition of Great Britain would be less commanding, Mr. Fox, on the 24th of March, moved that the House might resolve itself into a Committee of the whole House, to consider of the state of the nation. I had the good fortune to hear the noble oration by which this motion was supported. Its principal heads and arguments the public is happily possessed of; but not of all the subordinate parts which connected them together, much less of that awful and commanding eloquence which brought home every part of it to the understanding and the heart. It did not, however, add a single name to the division, and although the internal commotions of France were then fast subsiding, though her present constitution was in a state of organization, though the King of Prussia's conduct was more than ambiguous, though the French had penetrated into the heart of Catalonia, and a peace of necessity with Spain was inevitably approaching, and though we were proceeding by remonstrance against the Swiss cantons, Tuscany, and Genoa, on the subject of their neutrality; yet the Parliament was prorogued without any inquiry into the past, or plan or object for the future; an insuperable obstacle of peace was wantonly preserved, and France was left under the ban of excommunication to exhaust our resources, to separate us from our allies, to extend her conquests, and upon the unalterable and universal principles of human conduct, to nourish that spirit of distrust and animosity, at which we now affect to be surprised.

When the parliament met, on the 29th of October, 1795, some of the changes in the affairs of Europe, which all the world, except ministers, had seen the certain approach of, had arrived, and the rest were following. The detestable expedition at Quiberon had failed, and covered its authors with everlasting shame; all prospect of keeping up rebellion in La Vendee had vanished, and France was

far advanced in the organization of her present constitution; many of our possessions in the West Indies had been over-run and pillaged, the King of Prussia had totally departed from his alliance, and Spain had been forcibly detached from it; the dominion of the Stadtholder had passed away, and his Majesty declared to us to be in a state of war with subjugated Holland. Ministers, however saw nothing in all this, disastrous or alarming—on the contrary, his Majesty's speech began with the following encouraging declaration:

“ It is a great satisfaction to me to reflect, that notwithstanding the many events unfavourable to the common cause, the prospect resulting from the general situation of affairs has, in many respects, been materially improved in the course of the present war.”

Amongst the enumerated improvements, the alteration in the affairs of France was not omitted, and would probably have appeared the most striking and remarkable if it had not been wholly eclipsed by the conclusion which was drawn from it.

France had now organized her new constitution, and as the country was looking with increased anxiety to the moment when she might be declared capable of negotiation, it might have been expected that ministers would have advised his Majesty to connect the communication of this important event with the prospect of immediate peace.

If, by the practice of the constitution, the speech of the Sovereign proceeded personally from himself, it is impossible they could have been separated; but the speech of the King is the speech of his minister, and is always so considered by the Parliament and the nation, and in good truth the present one bears the most indelible and genuine marks of its author.

As the anarchy of France was in a manner admitted to be at an end, what was to come next? A government undoubtedly capable of maintaining the relations of amity—*no*—this conclusion would have been too rapid a motion towards a negotiation.... We were therefore told, “ that the distraction and anarchy which had prevailed in France had led to a crisis, of which it was as yet impossible to foresee the issue; but which, in all human probability,

must produce consequences highly important to the interests of Europe.

This bold and penetrating declaration led the way, as might be expected, to the old necessity of prosecuting the war with vigour and alacrity; and accordingly, with the communication of new treaties, this was the conclusion of his Majesty's speech, which, in the form of a suitable address, received again the sanction of the late House of Commons.

On this occasion Mr. Fox once more implored the ministers, and the House, and the nation, to advert to our condition, and the utter impracticability of succeeding in the object of the war, and proposed an humble address, "earnestly beseeching his Majesty not to consider the governing powers of France to be incapable of maintaining the accustomed relations of peace and amity, and appealing to the recent treaties she had entered into, and the peace that she already maintained with Prussia, Spain, and several of the princes of the empire."— This salutary proposition was also negatived— the minister, at the same time, declaring, that when the constitution of France should be put in activity with the acquiescence of the nation, so as to enable its legislature to speak as the representatives of the French people, we ought *then* to be ready to negotiate, without any regard to the form or nature of the government.

Here then was another explicit admission, that without any refusal on the part of France to negotiate, or upon any specific difference (*as at present*) concerning terms of peace, we were suffering her to consolidate her empire, to nourish her animosities, to dissolve our alliances, and to threaten Europe with universal subjugation: the blood and money of England pouring out, in the mean time, until our constitution mongers and augurs of political capacities should be satisfied that France was fit to be received into the holy communion of the robbers and destroyers of Poland.

"The longest day will have an end." In only a little more than a month after this period, France had completed her probation to the satisfaction of his Majesty's ministers, who accordingly advised the King to send a message to the Commons on the 9th of December, acquaint-

ing the House, " That the crisis which was depending at the beginning of the session, had led to such a state of things, as would induce his Majesty to *meet* any disposition to negotiation on the part of the enemy, with an earnest desire to give it the fullest and speediest effect, and to conclude a treaty of general peace whenever it could be effected on just and suitable terms for his Majesty and his allies."

It is fit to pause here a little to examine this declaration; to consider to what, in honest effect, though not in precise words, it pledged the ministers who advised it, that we may be enabled to examine the correspondence or repugnancy of their subsequent conduct to their solemn engagements in the mouth of their Sovereign.

The declaration admits the return of France to a capacity to maintain the common relations of peace and amity, because, though it masks this capacity under the vague designation of *a state of things*, yet a readiness to negotiate, in avowed conformity with the King's former declarations, amounts to a substantive admission, that the *formerly declared obstacle* to peace from the condition of France was done away. Moreover, by the expression of an earnest desire, on the part of his Majesty, to give the fullest effect to the speediest negotiation of an honourable peace, it unquestionably bound the ministers to take some immediate step to manifest the sincerity of that declaration. But mark the reservation obviously introduced into the message to nullify this whole proceeding.

Ministers were pledged to no *active* step whatsoever: on the contrary, the language of the message compleatly secured to them the privilege of continuing perfectly passive upon the subject of peace. His Majesty only expressed his readiness to *meet* any disposition *on the part of his enemies* to negotiate. Now, considering again the royal declaration as not at all personal to the King, but wholly as the act of his ministers, in what language shall I speak of it? Where or how was his Majesty, in the nature of things, to *meet* such pacific dispositions, however they might have been entertained on the part of France? The British government, by the various acts of its Crown and Parliament (enumerated in the preceding pages), had interposed a positive and public obstacle to negotiation—it

had declared the incapacity of the French government; an obstacle the most insulting and degrading ever offered by one independent nation to another; and, notwithstanding this declaration of the new state of things in the message, it is plain that this obstacle still continued.

The declaration was a mere private communication of the King of Great Britain to his own Parliament: it contained no signification to France of this change of sentiment regarding her government. The existence of a government was not even acknowledged.—If indeed his Majesty had accompanied the communication to his own Parliament with an authoritative declaration to the new government of France, acknowledging its civil capacity as the representative of the French nation, and expressing a readiness to negotiate, even in the passive language of the message, I should then have considered such a proceeding as a fair motion towards peace. But I again make my constant appeal to the enlightened good sense of the country, whether, without making France at all a party to this proceeding, without any declaration to her, that we saw that capacity in her government admitted by the message but which we had so long denied, it was possible ministers could believe for a moment that they were really advancing in the work of peace. I desire to stand or fall in the whole of what I have written, as this plain question shall be answered by every man whose reason is not disordered, or whose heart is not corrupted.

When the message came to be taken into consideration in the House of Commons on the 9th of December, the remarks I have made upon the wording of it were completely illustrated. The address breathed nothing but vigorous preparations for continuing the war—not a hint was given of any communication to France of our sentiments concerning her new government; nor was there any thing in the language of ministers that could lead France even to believe, that we looked towards a negotiation in the genuine temper and spirit of peace.

In opposition to this address, an amendment was moved by Mr. Sheridan, “ lamenting that his Majesty had been led to consider the internal order of things in France as an obstacle to peace, because if the present order of things were admitted as the inducement to negotiation, a change

of that order of things might be considered as a ground for discontinuing negotiation begun, or even for abandoning a treaty concluded; and praying his Majesty to give distinct directions, that immediate negotiation might be entered upon for the above salutary object." I forbear to notice the powerful manner by which this most seasonable proposition was supported, because it might seem as if it were the only occasion in which this extraordinary person had employed his great talents in Parliament upon the subject of the war. I have not before had occasion to name Mr. Sheridan, because my object naturally led me to the propositions made in Parliament during the war, and not to the debates on them, which are in the hands of every body; but when I am brought to name him as the mover of this amendment, it is but a just tribute to so happy an union of public spirit and genius, to express my admiration of the various powers of his mind, which nature has so seldom united. A superior and sublime eloquence, the force of sound reasoning, and the happiest command of wit, which serves occasionally to expose when no arguments would defeat, and which affords the happiest illustration of Pope's description of this rare and useful qualification.

For the same reasons, let me not be thought to have overlooked the merits of the few excellent and accomplished persons who compose the minority in both Houses of Parliament, and who have distinguished themselves by their talents and steadiness in the cause of their country—amidst the most mortifying and dispiriting circumstances which ever attended any opposition in British Houses of Parliament. This small body of men have stood firmly and indefatigably at their posts, animated by the sensations which a great moral writer ascribes to greatness under temporary depression and neglect; "Little disappointed, not at all dejected, relying upon their own merit with steady consciousness; and waiting, without impatience, the vicissitudes of opinion and the impartiality of a future generation."

From the 9th of December, 1795, when this message from the King was agitated, and the proposition for negotiation was negatived, until the 8th of March, 1796, when Mr. Wickham transmitted the note* to M. Barthe-

* See the note alluded to in his Majesty's late message, and printed with the other parts of the negociation, on Lord Almeybury's return from Paris, for the use of both Houses of Parliament.

lemp, no motion whatsoever, directly or indirectly, was made by ministers towards peace—on the contrary, when they were again urged to it by a motion of Mr. Grey, in the House of Commons, on the 6th of February, the answer was, that though the negotiation had been declared inadmissible, they were not to be bound hand and foot to negotiate; and we are now therefore brought, at last, to the period of Mr. Wickham's proposition, the true criterion by which the wisdom and sincerity of ministers, on the subject of peace, must be estimated; not only because both the time and the mode were the result of their own long deliberations, but because they have been pleased to assert, in his Majesty's late royal declaration, “that the step in question was the best calculated for its object; that the answer of the French government was haughty and evasive, and affected to question the sincerity of those dispositions of which his Majesty's conduct afforded *so unequivocal a proof.*” Laying in constitutional claim, a third time, to consider his Majesty's declaration as the declaration of his minister merely, and for which he is personally responsible, I utterly deny that the best step, or that any just or rational step was taken by ministers in Mr. Wickham's propositions towards peace. And I assert, that it was impossible that France should not actually entertain that suspicion of our sincerity which the declaration charges to be affected.

In order to establish the grounds of this assertion, I desire only to recur to the observation which I have already made upon his Majesty's message in the December preceding.

Till that time, France had been declared incapable of maintaining the common civil intercourse of nations. Her government had been publicly branded to all Europe as a den of tyrants and robbers, and her country had been invaded, not only by foreign war, but by her revolted subjects, under English banners, to desolate France by intestine and civil fury.

I am not now re-arguing the impropriety of such a proceeding, I am only stating the fact, in order to estimate its natural effects.

When Mr. Wickham made his proposition in March, no notification (as I have observed already) had been given

to France that any change of sentiment had taken place in the British councils on the subject of her government, neither could she read it in the conduct of the war. England was still endeavouring to engage the activity of her allies in the original cause which had confederated Europe. She continued as before to subsidize the Emperor, and, what is more important, she continued to pay the army of the Prince of Conde, made up of French noblemen, who could not be supposed to be fighting for the new French constitution, and whom, by the bye, they never took into pay until they had in effect given up the very cause for which these unfortunate men were contending.

Under these circumstances, could France really believe that we were sincerely converted to her republican government by the division of the Council of Ancients from the Council of Five Hundred, and in the striking similitude between the five persons of the Directory and the hereditary unity of the monarchical part of a state? Had we acknowledged her government? or had we told her of this happy and wonderful conversion? or is there a man of honour in England, who will lay his hand upon his heart and say, that he believes this new French constitution, this legitimate infant of a month old, was the cause of the King's message? Nay, further, who will not admit that the growing necessities of the country, and the feelings of the people on the subject of the war, did not solely and singly produce it? And that ministers were feeling their way towards peace, whilst they were taking the chance of the tables to support and to triumph in the war? Let Mr. Burke and Lord Fitzwilliam answer these questions, respectable witnesses as they are, from the consistency of their testimony.---Let them tell us upon their honours, where was the difference between this new order of things expressed in the King's message, and the old order of things, which was with them and ministers together, *and still with them*, the foundation of the war with France, and the flame that fed it from the beginning. How could we then be so weak as to expect, that a most subtle, insulted, and enraged enemy, would believe what we do not believe ourselves, and what no man of common sense ever did, or to the end of the world will believe.

But supposing these observations to be out of the ques-

tion, was there any thing in the mode of Mr. Wickham's proposition as connected with the antecedent or with the existing relations of the two countries, which gave it even the air of a serious and manly embassy from one great state at war with another; Mr. Wickham had no diplomatic character conferred upon him for the purpose of negotiation--he was only the minister to the Swiss cantons: he had no specific instructions from his court on the subject, except indeed those which he communicated to Mr. Barthelimi, *viz.* "That he was not in any manner authorised to enter with him into any negociation or discussion upon the subject of his note."

The object, therefore, of Mr. Wickham's proposition, and the extent of this authority, were to pump M. Barthelimi. A new title in the code of diplomacy, perfectly suitable to the novel principles upon which the war had been engaged. But what must be decisive with every thinking person, that ministers were rather seeking for some public justification for continuing the war than anxiously looking for an opening towards peace, is their conduct upon receiving the answer of France transmitted to Mr. Wickham.

This answer, like the late one to Lord Malmesbury at Paris, set up the French constitution as an absolute bar to the cession of any part of the territory of the republic, but in other respects inviting negotiation.

Now I am not at all about to justify this pretension of France, far less the reason of it, which I consider to be perfectly frivolous, and unworthy of a great and enlightened nation in its communication with another; but for that very reason I consider the answer as more favourable for continuance of negotiation than if they had refused the cession on the ground of national safety produced by the aggressions of the confederacy; because as no determination was expressed to keep Belgium, except for a reason which further discussion might well have shewn to be no reason at all, it appears to me to have opened to ministers (had they really been anxious for peace) a far better opportunity for keeping negotiation open, than when they afterwards sent Lord Malmesbury to Paris to recommence it; and which, if accompanied with a gentleness and frankness, not only consistent with, but the very charac-

teristic of, independence and greatness, might have been attended with the most salutary consequences. Instead of this, what was the conduct of the very men who now talk to us of their sincerity, and who demand our confidence as peace-makers?

Although Mr. Wickham's note was a collateral, private, and, I might almost say, a confidential communication from Mr. Wickham to M. Barthelemy, to sound the dispositions of the French government as a channel to further communications; yet no sooner was this answer given, and by the same collateral mode of communication we had ourselves prescribed, than we immediately and eagerly seized the opportunity of officially * publishing it to all Europe in the name of the Court of London, making it the vehicle of fresh abuse upon France, and of a new spur to the vigorous prosecution of the war.

But what is worst of all (and for which, in my opinion, ministers deserve the severest censure and punishment), they dictated in this note a language for their sovereign to all the courts of Europe, containing a pledge scarcely preserved already, and from which perhaps, it may be wisdom hereafter wholly to depart, "While these dispositions shall be persisted in," (says the note of the Court of London, adverting to the refusal to disannex any part of the French territory) "nothing is left for the King but to prosecute a war equally just and necessary." The note then goes on to say, "that whenever the King's enemies should manifest more pacific sentiments, his Majesty would then concur with his allies in measures the best calculated to restore peace."

Now let us see how well his Majesty's ministers have maintained this dignified language of their Sovereign; let us examine whether, for the mere purpose of obtaining money for the prosecuting their favourite war, they did not hold out fallacious hopes of peace when not a shadow of new hope existed; whether they did not make his Majesty "lower the tone of his public declaration to all Europe," by sending a public embassy to Paris without any manifestations of more pacific sentiments in our enemies; and whether, for the mere occasion, they did not falsely

* Vide the note dated 10th of April, 1756, lately published for the use of the two Houses of Parliament.

create a strong sensation in the public mind on the subject of peace. Whether they did not tacitly, and in substance, hold out that something important had happened since the date of the circular note of the court of London, opening a new prospect of treating with effect, although they knew that things were not merely in the same condition, but in a much worse; because the interval had not been employed in conciliatory conduct; because the French might have been expected to be more haughty by recent successes, which were beyond the reach of imagination in the March preceding; and because, nevertheless, ministers had privately resolved to resist their former pretensions opposed to Mr. Wickham's negotiation by an absolute *fine qua non* in the front of the new one to be set on foot.

It would be an affront to the public to maintain by argument what speaks for itself, yet, to preserve the thread of the proceeding, some notice must be taken of this important embassy.

I have long had the honour to be well acquainted with Lord Malmesbury; I greatly respect his diplomatic talents, and I see no reason to change my opinion from any thing which is personal to him in the late negotiation. I lament the narrowness of his powers, and, indeed, if I were personally his enemy, I might as well abuse the bell-man, if I received a libel by the post, as reflect upon a messenger because he happens to be called an ambassador.

From the 9th of April last, the date of the circular note of the court of London, till the opening of the new Parliament in November, which announced Lord Malmesbury's mission, no intermediate step towards negotiation had been taken; and a very strong sensation began to prevail in the public mind on the subject. From the enormous public expenditure more alarming difficulties, in the way of the supplies, were at the same time approaching than any British minister ever had to encounter. The ordinary plan of a common loan was abandoned; and, as it was impossible to foresee with certainty the resources which the overflowing zeal of the public so rapidly provided, schemes of finance wholly new to England, and alien to her constitution, were publicly in agitation. Nothing, indeed, but Lord Malmesbury's mission could probably have prevented the experiment; but a direct motion towards peace

by a dignified embassy, and the prospect of obtaining it, which was industriously held out also, naturally animated the public zeal, and supplied with popularity the necessities of government.

To give time for this operation, was the obvious plan of the forms in which Lord Malmesbury was instructed to negotiate. Ministers had determined (no matter whether properly or not) to insist, that Belgium should not continue to be a part of France. The French Directory, on the other hand, (no matter whether properly or not) had determined not to cede it; and this determination they had publicly expressed in the month of March preceding. If England, therefore, with this determination of disannexing Belgium as a *fine qua non*, the propriety of which I am still not discussing, had really set on foot the negotiation, with a view to ascertain whether France still persisted in this unjust and unfounded pretension, as expressed by M. Barthelemy to Mr. Wickham, the business could not have lasted a day. It would of course have begun with a direct reference to the formerly expressed determination in March; it would have contained a candid, and, in my opinion, an easy refutation of its principles, and would have demanded an answer. This simple course would have brought the matter to an instantaneous conclusion. But, instead of this direct and obvious procedure, what do the papers which have been laid on the table of the House of Commons really contain? what have been the proceedings of this embassy, which seasonably occupied so many weeks, amusing the English public while the loan was transacting?

The whole proceeding is neither more nor less than this—the court of London having resolved upon a *fine qua non*, which they did not at first communicate, and which was in direct opposition to the former public *fine qua non* of France, as expressed in the March preceding, propose mutual compensation as the basis of negotiation. The Executive Directory, being determined not to adopt that basis of compensation which should break in upon their former determination, not to cede the territory of the republic, answer, that they cannot accept compensation as a basis, unless they know what it comprehends, and they therefore demand of Lord Malmesbury to state his specific proposition of compensation. This demand the ambassador,

in pursuance of his instructions, of course refuses, until the Directory should first admit the basis. After a considerable length of time in this dispute about nothing, the French Directory, who never meant, nor in common sense could mean, that mutual compensation (*the basis of every possible peace*) should not be the basis of the proposed one, but who were only determined not to accept *that* basis of compensation which comprehended the Netherlands, at last consent to remove this ridiculous stumbling-block, and, by M. Delacroix's letter to Lord Malmesbury the 27th of November, they hold this language to him, which accordingly removed it.

" Our answer, of the 5th and 22d of last Brumaire, contained an acknowledgment of the principle of compensation, by asking you to state what it comprehended. But to avoid all farther pretext of discussion on the subject, the Executive Directory now makes the positive declaration of such acknowledgment, and Lord Malmesbury is accordingly again invited in the terms of the proposal of 22d Brumaire, to designate without delay and expressly the objects of reciprocal compensation which he has to propose."

Now if peace, or the *instant* alternative between peace and war, had been the serious object of this embassy, was not a man of the ambassador's high dignity and great capacity to be entrusted with even a single term which constituted the *fine qua non* of his embassy? that single term was not, however, entrusted to Lord Malmesbury; and after the public mind was kept stretched upon the rack of impatience, the ambassador had no answer at all to give upon the subject, but desired to consult his court. The reason of this strange departure from the ordinary and natural course of negotiation, in the hands of a high and accomplished ambassador, all the world is already aware of. Procrastination was most material, not only from the particular circumstance of the loan, but from the critical state of the war. When the embassy was first projected, we were in the lowest ebb of disgrace and misfortune. We had nothing left to cover our nakedness but what we had torn from the Dutch, for whose protection we went to war; and our last ally, the Emperor, was likely to be even besieged in his capital: but whilst Lord Malmesbury

was at Paris, the unexampled spirit and gallantry of the Archduke Charles changed the face of things, and the season became favourable for negociation to lie upon its oars.

At last, however, the specified demand of compensation, which every body is acquainted with, was transmitted to, and delivered by Lord Malmesbury, in which England demanded restitution to the Emperor, on the footing of the *status ante bellum*. This demand was not expressed in terms as a *sine qua non*, or ultimatum, upon the face of the confidential memorial; but in the collateral discussions with M. Delacroix, it was expressed as a *positive ultimatum that Belgium should not remain as part of France*. This appears by Lord Malmesbury's letter to Lord Grenville in the following words*: " You then persist (said M. Delacroix), in applying this principle to Belgium? I answered, Most certainly: and I should not deal fairly with you if I hesitated to declare in the outset of the negociation, *that on this point you must entertain no expectation that his Majesty will relax, or ever consent to see Belgium a part of France.*" And again in the same letter, " He (M. Delacroix) again asked me, Whether in his report he was to state the disuniting Belgium as a *sine qua non* from which his Majesty would not depart? I replied, *It most certainly was a sine qua non from which his Majesty would not depart.*" And again in the very next paragraph, " M. Delacroix repeated his concern at the peremptory way in which I made this assertion; and asked Whether it would admit of no modification? I replied, If France could in a *contre projet*, point out a practicable and adequate one, *still keeping in view that the Netherlands must not be French, or likely again to fall into the hands of France*, such a proposal might certainly be taken into consideration."

This *last* expression, which has been considered as opening the negociation, by the admission of a *contre projet*, not only re-insists upon the original *sine qua non*, but even adds another, not expressed before; for Lord Malmesbury adds, that this *contre projet* must not only keep in view, that Belgium should not be French, which he had said before;

* This letter is very creditable to Lord Malmesbury; it never could be intended for publication, yet it has all the perspicuity, correctness, and elegance, of the most studied performance.

" but, that it should not be again likely to fall into the hands of France."

This private discussion being finished, M. Delacroix, but without positive instructions, expressed his own apprehension, that this would terminate the negotiation, and transmitted the note and confidential memorial to his government.

The Executive Directory having received them, and having learned undoubtedly from M. Delacroix, by Lord Malmesbury's permission, that the retrocession of Belgium from France, *though not officially expressed in the memorial as an ultimatum*, was nevertheless absolutely insisted on *as such*, they demanded of Lord Malmesbury that he would send his ultimatum *officially in writing*. This demand was expressed in the following words: " And to require of you to give into me *officially*, in twenty-four hours, your ultimatum signed by you."

This required ultimatum had undoubtedly a pointed reference to Belgium, and cannot be considered as a requisition of an ultimatum upon every collateral point of negotiation. It seems to have been so understood by Lord Malmesbury himself; for his Lordship referring to his official note, and also to his verbal declarations to M. Delacroix, *connecting them properly together*, expresses himself thus: " He therefore can add nothing to the assurances which he has already given to the minister for foreign affairs, as well by word of mouth as in his official note."

This answer from Lord Malmesbury, which was correct, explicit, and manly, incorporated by inference the *unofficial fine qua non*, delivered verbally to M. Delacroix, with the *official demand of the status ante bellum*, contained in the confidential memorial. The Directory considered it as such, and therefore repeated their former ultimatum on that point, as expressed in the March preceding to Mr. Wickham, *viz.* " That they would listen to no proposal contrary to the constitution, to the laws, and to the treaties which bind the Republic." This answer being ultimatum against ultimatum, upon a particular point, the negotiation was brought to an inevitable conclusion; and it is self-evident, that this must have been its fate in one day or in one hour, if Great Britain, aware, with the rest

of Europe, of the former determination of France regarding Belgium, and determined to continue to resist that pretension, had asked her *at once* whether she would consent to modify or to abandon it.

When the details of this negotiation came to be considered in the House of Commons, on the 30th of December last, the minister displayed all that dexterity and ability, for which he is so remarkable. His object was to conceal from the House these obvious conclusions which stare one in the face from reading the proceedings, and to incense the Parliament and the nation at the insolent unfounded pretences of France, which defeated, by their unparalleled absurdity and inadmissibility, the earnest anxiety of ministers for peace. He wisely, therefore, and ably, and dexterously, kept in the back ground the thing refused, which formed the obstacle. He prudently suppressed the details of his own administration, which had given to France both the power and the temper to refuse the demanded cession of Belgium, and brought forward, with the greatest address, the unfounded reasons for the refusal; reasons, which I am the last man to support; which I think are absurd and ridiculous, but which were, in fact, very little to the argument of our situation. Mr. Pitt knew this, and therefore seized upon it as the weak point of his adversary. He made it every thing in his view of considering the termination of the negotiation, and triumphed with the House by a forcible and eloquent, but, for the following reasons, a fallacious statement.

The danger of suffering Belgium to remain with France was much sunk in his argument, and the evil mainly insisted upon was her *unfounded reason* for resisting the cession. He not only enlarged upon the injustice of a nation finally annexing a territory acquired during war*; but appealing to the French constitution, he denied that it

* Mr. Pitt appears to have forgot the annexation of Corsica, by his Majesty's solemn acceptance of its crown; and I will not insult the King, by supposing, that if the fate of war had permitted it, and the Corsicans had claimed our protection as the price of their accepted allegiance, our gracious sovereign would have abandoned them to the possible resentment of their former governors. However, as the crown was accepted without the consent of Parliament, the difficulty might have been got over, and ministers might have denied that Corsica had ever been legally annexed to the British crown.

established its annexation. This part of the minister's speech was by far the most laboured, argumentative, and ingenious; insomuch, that I could not help being struck, in the moment, with the force of that characteristic infirmity, which seems to impel him as it were, by a law of his nature, to act always upon one principle under the pretext of another.

If the possession of Belgium by France, from its extent of coast and other local circumstances, be really so dangerous to England in her insular character, or as connected in interest with the political balances of the continent, that it is found policy to continue the war at all events, in the hopes of compelling its restitution, then the defence of the minister for his *present* conduct would be substantial; but it is plain that his defence in that case would be founded upon the refusal of France to give up Belgium, and not upon the reasons for which she refused it.

To try the force of this reasoning, let me suppose she had been willing to cede Belgium, and every territory of any consequence demanded of her, with the exception of some insignificant fort or town, which she had refused upon the footing of annexation during the war, under her constitution. Let me further suppose (which is necessary for bringing the touchstone to the argument), that it was admitted the thing refused was of no consequence or value to Great Britain. In such a case, is any man prepared to contend, that we ought to continue the war, *not for the cession of additional territory*, but to beat the French out of an unfounded reason for refusing what we did not want? Having been at war so long to destroy her whole constitution, and having at last abandoned its destruction, were we now to continue it only to batter this chip from off a corner of it? Or, admitting the constitution of France to be a rule for France, were we to spend a hundred millions more to prove that she did not understand her own constitution, and that Mr. Pitt was the only able commentator upon the text of it? To do Mr. Pitt justice, notwithstanding his public pretences, he does not seriously obtain such an absurdity. The putting forward the reason of refusal which is unfounded and fallacious, and keeping back the view of the real question, the value of the thing refused, and the chance of retrieving it by continu-

ing the war, It was to hide from the House and the Country, that we were actually to be at war for Belgium.

To put this plain truth beyond the reach of controversy, let me suppose (to expose our state quackery) that France were to abandon the ground of political annexation altogether, and to assert, as she has to her own people, her possession of the Netherlands upon the principle of safety against future aggression from the northern powers of Europe---should we, in that event, be nearer to a peace? The best answer to this question is an appeal to the King's first note delivered by Lord Malmesbury, wherein originated the basis of negotiation. The cession of Belgium to the Emperor is there proposed by the King upon the footing, that the sacred obligation of his crown, and the force of treaties, rendered it binding upon his Majesty to demand it.

Upon *this* basis of negotiation it is plain, that the refusal of cession, whatever might have been the reason for it, or a refusal *without a reason*, must equally have terminated the negotiation; because the sacred obligations of his Majesty's crown, and the binding force of treaties, have no relation whatever to the resistance of arrogant pretensions of France against the law of nations, but apply wholly to the duty imposed upon his Majesty to obtain for the Emperor the possession of the Netherlands.

The war is therefore continued at this moment in consequence of the sine qua non of Great Britain; which is Belgium, and not at all upon the reason given why that sine qua non is resisted; since it is plain, that if the cession of Belgium to the Emperor be our *ultimatum*, the refusal of yielding to that ultimatum must have been an absolute bar to peace, whatever might have been the reason of refusing to accede to it, or though no reason had been given by the party refusing.

The British nation is therefore at this moment at war for Belgium: since, supposing all other obstacles could be removed, this territory, upon the footing of the late negotiation, remains an unsuperable bar to peace; England insisting to demand, and France to refuse it.

But is the annexation of Belgium, thus artfully put forward, as if it were the grand embarrassment, the only reason given or entertained by France for refusing the de-

manded cession? We know the contrary. It appears from M. Delacroix's discussion with Lord Malmesbury, that though it could not be ceded by an act of the executive power, and consequently not by the Directory, as the basis of a treaty, yet that it might be done by the convocation of primary assemblies; but France has given other public and official reasons to her own subjects (and which are unquestionably her real ones) why this course is not likely to be taken, and why the cession of Belgium will probably not be admitted.

These reasons involve ministers in that deep responsibility which it has been the object of these pages to make plain to the British nation. France considers the original annexation of Belgium as an act of necessity imposed upon her by the aggression of confederated Europe, and she maintains the possession of it against the future assaults of the same conspiracy.

Until the treaty of Pilnitz had been framed for the destruction of her constitution, and the dismemberment of her empire, she had not extended its limits. The hostile system of Europe against France had been resolved on, and the Emperor had actually begun the war, before the Netherlands were invaded. The entreaties of Louis the Sixteenth to the Emperor Joseph to desist from his purposes, and to maintain the tranquillity of Europe, were most earnest and affecting. They bore his name as King of the French; and though they were the public acts of his ministers, yet their sincerity was avowed and insisted on by that most unfortunate prince upon his trial, and shortly before his death. Long after the war was raging in Europe, and when his fate became hourly more critical by the ill-omened protection of despots, the same earnest appeal was made by him to the councils of Great Britain; our mediation with the Emperor was earnestly intreated, and haughtily refused; the continuation of peace, on the renunciation of conquest and aggrandizement, was also humbly offered, and with the same loftiness rejected.

The same offers were renewed on the part of the republic, and were not merely resisted, but repelled with insult by the sudden dismissal of the ambassador from the kingdom.

Since that period Europe and France have been opposed

to each other. If the combined princes could at any time have penetrated through Alsatia, or through the Netherlands, into the territories of the republic, the republic must have fallen. And could they do so to-morrow, France must feel that her independence would be endangered. This situation probably produced the annexation of the Netherlands, and the sense of similar dangers now opposes its retrocession.

These are facts; and they not only expose the misconduct of ministers, but demonstrate, that whilst their system of policy remains in force, there is no hope that France, feeling a sense of security, will relax from demands which a natural anxiety for security has suggested.

I can have no pleasure in adverting to this calamitous prospect. But it is not by concealing the public distemper that its cure can be effected—to heal the wound, it must have probed.—If I am charged (as Mr. Fox lately was in the House of Commons) with suggesting arguments to the enemy, I answer, that they are not my private arguments, but the public arguments of France; that, to pluck them from her mouth, we must by wise councils change the temper that dictates them, and by removing her sense of danger which gives them strength with her people, detach her from the system she pursues. Let us not deceive ourselves—nations and the councils of nations are made up of men; and their operations must invariably be pursued upon human interests and mixed up with human passions. Upon this principle I desire to ask, whether Great Britain, under the direction of her present councils, can expect from France, whom they have so long thrust out from the pale of civil society, the same temper and concession as if the war had been conducted upon the ordinary principles of belligerent nations? It may be *very desirable*, that, upon the first moment of our return to our senses, all these things should be forgotten and overlooked; but is it in the nature of human affairs that this should happen?

Let us assimilate a contest with a nation composed of men, to a quarrel with an individual man, in so rude a state of society as that there should be no certain law to give a rule for both. The analogy is a close one, because nations have no common superior. If, instead of differing with a man upon some intelligible point of controversy,

some distinct claim of possession violated, or some personal insult unredressed, and for which I demanded satisfaction, I should proclaim him as a wretch unfit for the exercise of social life, combine all his neighbours to destroy his dwelling, and invite his children and servants to rob and murder him, until insulted nature, summoning up more than ordinary strength, might enable him to resist the conspiracy, to enlarge his boundaries on the side from whence the attacks had been made, and to set his house in order for the return of domestic life :— suppose I should then suddenly affect to see a great change in him, and were to declare that I now found him to be a man capable of neighbourhood, and that if he would restore to his neighbours what he had taken from them I would be at peace with him; whilst human nature is human nature, what answer might I expect? He would say undoubtedly—if I believed you to be sincere, and that you and my neighbours, against whom I have been compelled to take security, were in earnest to keep the peace with me, I might be disposed to listen to your proposition. I told you originally that I had no wish to enlarge my boundaries, and that I only desired to be at peace: but now, if I remove it, what security have I, that, when your bruises are healed, brought on by your own violence, I may not be the victim of a fresh conspiracy when I may be less able to resist it? I must, therefore, keep what you compelled me for my own security to occupy. I have, besides, borrowed money upon the property I was thus entitled to take; the occupants have laid out money on them; they assisted me in my distress; they prevented my utter ruin by your conspiracy; and I have sworn not to desert them. This would be the answer of every man, and of every nation under heaven, when the proud provokers of strife are the baffled proposers of peace.

With regard to the actual danger of suffering Belgium to remain with France, I am not sufficiently master of the subject to be qualified publicly to discuss it. It involves many weighty considerations, and is a fair subject of political difference. But I lay in my claim that the consideration of its importance may always be discussed with a reference to the probability of regaining it, and the price at which it must be regained. Let it never be forgotten

that by pursuing it through war, though upon the principle of security, we may regain it a price which leaves us nothing to secure; which breaks up our credit, and dissolves our government.

It is remarkable that most of the arguments which are now employed to vindicate the rejection of peace until Belgium can be separated from the French Republic, are the considerations of distant and contingent consequences; and these arguments are loud and vehement in the mouths of those very men who scorned all consequences, however immediate, when they were opposed to the system of the war. It has appeared that when they began the contest they refused to look at its most obvious and calamitous consequences, and when warned of them in every stage towards their accomplishment, they rejected them with disdain as vague and visionary speculations. But now, when it becomes convenient to hold up consequences in order to justify the continuation of hostilities begun and prosecuted in utter contempt of them, they themselves enter into speculations the most distant and most doubtful ever resorted to by statesmen. To disappoint the advantages of peace, they look much farther forward into futurity than they were asked by their opponents, in order to avert the horrors of war. They estimate, with all the anxiety of interested objection, every sinister consequence of a treaty which would leave France with an extended territory, and augur other dangers to Great Britain upon the most remote and uncertain contingencies. Surely this is the very reverse of that conduct which policy and morality universally dictate. War is in itself so mighty an evil, either politically or morally considered; it entails so many miseries upon mankind, even after the attainment of all its objects, that it ought never to be engaged in until after every effort and speculation have been employed to repel its approach. Peace, on the other hand, is the parent of so many blessings, that all nations ought to run into her embraces with an ardour which no distant or doubtful apprehensions should repel. What then must be the responsibility of the rash and precipitate authors of war, and the uniformly backward negotiators of its termination?

This fatal and obstinate misconduct is hourly producing

the most calamitous effects. The difference, though totally diverted from its original principle, has changed to another equally irrational. It began with an object in the nature of things unattainable, and for that very reason has reduced us to a contention for another which cannot be attained. Its authors are so completely bewitched with it, that in their zeal to preserve it they seem totally to have forgotten both the old ground on which they first made it, and the new one upon which they continue it. The only principle which has invariably distinguished all the periods of it, has been, that the extended territories of France were less dangerous than the changes wrought by her system in the minds of their inhabitants ; that conquest was insignificant when compared with proselytism ; and yet for the sake of disannexing Belgium merely as a territory, with a view to sea coast, and to continental balances, they are suffering, whilst I am writing, the whole face of the earth to be rapidly changing under their eyes, by the continuance of war ; the authors contenting themselves with railing here at home against republican theorists, who never existed but in their own imaginations, whilst they themselves are the practical founders of republics all over Europe, which existed only at first in their own imaginations, but which they have since substantially realised by their works.

It is truly lamentable that this reflection, instead of being a sarcasm upon government, falls very short of the truth. The war is professedly continued at this moment for another campaign or more, as circumstances may arise ; just as if it could be so kept up, upon the mere calculation of expence, to be put down again, like an establishment or an equipage, at the call of convenience or prudence. In the mean time the great regular governments of Europe, dissolved from their union, and exhausted by their efforts, are becoming feeble as adversaries, and contemptible to their own subjects, whilst the smaller states of Italy, from which France might have been withdrawn by a cordial and manly negotiation, are now starting up into new conditions of society, under the fascinating banners of glory and victory ; and England, instead of dictating a constitution, and boundaries to the French republic, or settling at Paris the imaginary balances of Europe,

may be probably soon driven to fight against her upon English ground for her own constitution; whilst the waste and anticipation of her resources nourishes disgust and alienation to its excellent principles, and destroys that enthusiasm which nothing but the practical enjoyment of good government can inspire.

But to speak plainly and boldly my opinion with regard to peace, it is this—That when the relative situations of the two countries are considered, the cession of Belgium to the Emperor, the arrangement concerning St. Domingo, or any other specific line of negotiation, are as dust in the balance when compared with *the spirit and temper* of the peace which hereafter shall be made.

Supposing by our great ressources, and by the chances of war, we could drive the government of France to recede from her present pretensions, not upon the approach of a new æra of security, confidence, and friendship, but to avoid a political explosion by the destruction of her credit: consider coolly what sort of peace this would be—where the hostile mind remained;—consider how easily France might again embroil us to the hazard of our finances, and of our constitution which leans absolutely upon public credit for support. The excitation, therefore, which prevails at present to artificial hatred and distrust of France, is a most fatal and ruinous policy for England. No man is less disposed than I am to surrender an atom of the principles of our fathers to French, or to any other principles. I shall on the contrary, be found at all times amongst the foremost to assert them, because I have been bred, beyond most others, to know their value: but the soundness of our institutions, the attachment which must follow from a pure administration of them, and their mortal connection with the public credit of the state, convince me that our salvation must absolutely depend upon a speedy and liberal peace sought “in the spirit of peace, and laid in principles purely pacific.” These last words are the words of Mr. Burke: they were employed by him whilst to use his own expression, “we yet worked in the light,” —they were employed by him to shew the meats by which America might have been brought back to a profitable subjection to Great Britain, which if she had been, all

the calamities that have since desolated Europe would have been averted.

The writings of Mr. Burke have had a great and extensive influence in producing and continuing this fatal contest. Let us avail ourselves, then, of the great wisdom of his former writings to lay the foundations of peace.

When an extraordinary person appears in the world, and adds to its lights by superior maxims of policy and wisdom, he cannot afterwards destroy their benefits by any contradictions, real or apparent, in his reasonings or in his conduct. We are not to receive the works of men as revelations, but as the chequered productions of our imperfect natures, from which, by the help of our own reasonings, we are seasonably to separate the good from the evil. This is the true course to be taken with all human authorities. It is a poor triumph to discover that man is not perfect, and an imprudent use of the discovery to reject his wisdom, when the very fault we find with his infirmities is, that they tend to deprive us of its advantages. Differing wholly from Mr. Burke, and lamenting the consequences of his late writings, I always think of the books and of the author in this kind of temper. Indeed when I look into my own mind, and find its best lights and principles fed from that immense magazine of moral and political wisdom, which he has left as an inheritance to mankind for their instruction, I feel myself repelled by an awful and grateful sensibility from petulantly approaching him *.

I recollect that his late writings cannot deceive me, because his former ones have fortified me against their deceptions. When I look besides at his inveterate consistency even to this hour, when all support from men and things have been withdrawn from him; when I compare him with those who took up his errors only for their own convenience and for the same convenience laid them down again, he rises to such a deceptive height from the comparison, that with my eyes fixed upon ministers, I view him as if upon an eminence too high to be approached.

The principles upon which Mr. Burke founded the

* If reference is had to the arguments of the author during the state trials. In the trial of Mr. Paine, and upon several other occasions, he will be found to have uniformly pursued this course with regard to Mr. Burke.

whole system of his conciliation with America, were not narrow and temporary, but permanent and universal. They were not applicable only to a dispute between a mother country and her colonies, but to every possible controversy between equal and independent nations; they were not subject to variation from the tempers and characters of the contending parties, because being founded in human nature they embraced the whole world of man.

The maxims of pacification which he laid down were plain and simple, but for that very reason were the wiser. Wisdom does not consist in complexity; the system of the universe is less intricate than a country clock.

The first grand maxim which I before adverted to, and which, in truth, includes all others, was, that peace is not best sought "through the medium of war, nor to be hunted through the labyrinth of endless negotiation; but was to be sought in the spirit of peace, and laid in principles purely pacific." He inculcated, that crimination and recrimination was not the course by which any human controversy was to be ended; and, above all he protested against the ruling vice and impolicy of the present administration, who have never had any definable system of peace or warfare, who have always mixed the bitterness of reproach with propositions for conciliation, and have uniformly brandished the sword in one hand with more irritating menace, at the very moment they were holding forth the olive branch in the other.

This we did also in the American war—the repealing acts which we passed to soothe America, were generally carried out in the same ship with new penal bills to coerce them. This induced Mr. Burke in Parliament to express his doubts of their efficacy:— " You send out an angel of peace, but you send out a destroying angel along with her, and what will be the effects of the conflict of these adverse spirits is what I dare not say. Whether the lenient measures will cause passion to subside, or the severer increase its fury: all this is in the hands of Providence; yet now, even now, I should confide in the prevailing virtue and efficacious operation of lenity, though working in darkness and in chaos. In the midst of

this unnatural and turbid combination, I should hope it might produce order and beauty in the end."**

I have never passed this sentence through my mind, where it has been present for many years, without being deeply affected by it. Its eloquence is only valuable as it makes the moral and political truth sink deeper into the understanding and the heart. The angel of peace dressed in smiles and cloathed with her own mild attributes, is not merely described as triumphing in the blue serene, where only ordinary passions are to be opposed to her ; but, as if Mr. Burke had looked forward to his own picture of the French revolution, he trusts to her operation, though working in darkness and in chaos, in the midst of unnatural and turbid combination, and looks forward from her presence to order and beauty in the end.

The unalterable effect of this genuine spirit and principle of peace, it is but justice to Mr. Burke to say, he has never fled from. He is in this perfectly consistent with himself ; he, of course, does not agree with the plan I am suggesting, because he proposes no peace with France, because he thinks the peace of the world would be sacrificed by its attainment : but if he could once be brought to agree that peace was desirable, I would be contented to stand or fall as he subscribed to what I am proposing. Grant but the premises of his late writings, and all his deductions are full of the same vigour, and lighted up with the same eloquence, which distinguish every thing he has written. It is his false premises only, that leads him astray, and make such havoc in the world. But ministers have no sort of excuse for their conduct ; they profess to be sincere in desiring peace, yet they refuse to pursue the only methods by which, between man and man, or between nation and nation, it ever was, or ever can be permanently secured.

I have no more doubt than I entertain of my own

* Mr. Burke's Speech in the House of Commons, 29th of April, 1774.

existence, that if France saw a change in the British councils, and with that change a consequent renunciation of the system which produced the war, and which, though no longer avowed, notoriously obstructs its termination, the face of things would be entirely altered. The consequences of our misguided councils would no doubt load the negotiation, under whatever auspices it might be produced. The strong position which France has obtained, and the necessity to which England has reduced herself from the war, must be expected to be felt in the peace, whenever or by whomsoever it shall be made. But I look less to the terms, which I foresee will raise the difficulties, and which besides, may be smoothed and rounded by the spirit of conciliation, than I look to the future effects which that spirit would produce; to the solidity of the peace which would be fostered under its wings; to the return of that good will and the liberal confidence between nations, by which the prosperity of each strikes down fresh roots to the prosperity of all. Depend upon it, where peace is preserved, and its true spirit cultivated, the world is large enough for all the nations which compose it. As they multiply in numbers, and increase in arts and improvements, traffic only becomes more extensive and complicated; and traffic amongst nations is like traffic amongst individuals, he who has the greatest capital, and the best situation for trade, starts with an advantage which only imprudence can destroy.

This is still the situation of Great Britain. Her immense capital taken with all its mortgages, and her vast possessions in every quarter of the globe, would get the start of all Europe, toss it and tumble it, and divide it as you will *so as peace only can be preserved*. It is war following war, and accumulating revenue, their inseparable companions, that alone can destroy, and which has already near accomplished the destruction of Great Britain.

There is another superior advantage attending this liberal system of pacification, which, in former times, would have sunk deep into the feelings of Englishmen. The NATION would suffer no humiliation, though *ministers* would be disgraced. Such a peace would be a peace of liberal choice, not, as we look forward to it at present, of baffled necessity. The peace of a free and independent nation, lamenting the errors and sufferings of freedom, holding forth her ample shield to protect it every where, and laying the foundation of a tranquillity, which despotism never more should disturb. Compared with such a proceeding, what is the wresting of the sea-ports of Ostend and Antwerp, from France, in order to restore them to the Emperor, who in the transitions of things, may be the enemy of England to-morrow, whilst France may be her ally.

The ascendancy of France hereafter in the scale of Europe, whatever may be the ultimate terms of general tranquillity, must be always so very powerful, from the fertility and extent of her territory, her immense population, and the active genius of her people, that her relation to England can never be indifferent. She must always be a most desirable ally, or a most formidable enemy. If we were truly friends upon liberal principles, war must for a century be banished from the earth : if we continue at variance, from contemptible prejudices, it must be drowned in blood. When the complicated and clashing interests of two great countries, almost joined together, are contemplated, the various causes of quarrel which interest might sow, which jealousy might quicken, and which false pride must be always ripening into war, humanity shrinks back from consideration of the future. It is not for a very private man, like me, with no talents for a statesman, and engaged besides in the pursuits of a most laborious profession, to comprehend, in my view, the detailed interests of Great Britain as they intersect the interests of France.

But this I will say distinctly, that I would not accept the completest knowledge of all of them, nor the highest station to bring them into action, unless I was conscious of possessing, at the same time, the principles and the temper of turning them to the benefit of my country.

Without peace, and peace on a permanent basis, this nation, with all the trade which the world will furnish, cannot support her establishments, and must pass through bankruptcy into the jaws of revolution. All the qualifications of British statesmen for details and management are therefore frivolous and contemptible, when compared with those which fit them for peace-makers and for its guardianship when it is made. Cunning and haughtiness are no parts of this character. Peace-makers, to denote their humility and simplicity, are styled the *children of God*. For their own exaltation, our ministers have sufficiently humbled their country: let them at least take it by turns, and, that their country may now be exalted, let them humble themselves.

That an honourable peace might even now be obtained, if rationally and honestly pursued, every succeeding account establishes and confirms. Proceedings now provoke the indignation of the enlightened part of that nation, which not long ago would have been a signal for enthusiastic approbation. What was formerly a savage festival is now scarcely endured as a political commemoration, and we see her public councils, even in the first transports of their unexampled victories, hailing them as the harbingers of universal tranquillity.

But a peace alone would not secure Great Britain, in the present state of the world, as the war has left it. She must prepare to redeem herself from her burdens, and from the corruptions which occasioned them, by the noblest acts of fortitude and self-denial, and by the most rigid system of œconomy: every expence that is useless or inconvenient must be put

down: the resources of the country must be sifted and examined to the bottom, and the revenue upheld by their most judicious application. But no skill in finance, nor even integrity in a minister, can accomplish these great objects, without creating in all ranks and classes of the people a deep and warm interest in the supporting additional burdens, and an enthusiasm in the constitution which protects them in their rights.

This state of things is absolutely incompatible with the whole internal system of policy adopted by the present administration. It is in vain to think of even attempting the renovation of our country upon a principle of distrust and terror of the very inhabitants which compose it. The only remedy against mobs is to extend to the multitude the full privileges of a people. To give awful dignity and security to the Commons of England, let every man who has a house over his head have the proud sensation that he is present in it by deputation. The alarm of such a change, even though made by Parliament itself in the benevolence and justice of its dispensations, has always appeared to me very extraordinary. But its reception with enlightened men is wholly unaccountable. The strength and security of government, by the breadth of a popular basis, is confirmed by all experience, and by the universal analogies of things.

When a government emanates from the whole people, when the delegation, which forms the balance to its wisely fixed executive, is sufficiently mutable to prevent an agency from degenerating into a control, and sufficiently extended to be the organ of universal will, the clubs and societies and conventions which have frightened us out of our senses, could not in the nature of things exist. When the people themselves actually chuse the popular branch of the legislature, that forms the control upon the other parts of it, which are, for the wisest purposes, put

out of their own choice by other modifications, and where that choice is made for a very limited season, upon what principle can rebellion exist against such a Parliament, and who, in God's name, ~~are~~ to be the rebels? How can a people be brought to resist a voluntary emanation from themselves? By the operation of what vice or infirmity will they pull down the legislative organ of their own will? Even if such a body should occasionally betray its trust, the remedy is at hand without tumult or revolution; the agency expires by the forms of the constitution, and a better is appointed in its stead. The bad passions of men will, it is true, work up factions in the state; but factions, where there is a broad and general representation, are like waves which rise in the ocean and sink again insensibly into its bosom; it is only when confined and obstructed that they dash into foam, and destroy by the impetuosity of their course.

This was precisely the case in France.—Until there was a just and legitimate representation of the people, controlling the other modifications of a government, no matter how constituted, clubs and knots of men spread terror and confusion, and the people supported them; because they were represented in those clubs and factions, or not represented at all. They had no other security against tyranny than by a general organization of their authority, and the public humours therefore settled into factions. For this state of society there was no possible cure but legitimate power proceeding from the people. When force and violence were attempted, they only inflamed the temper; but when the cause was removed by a genuine organ of the public choice, the clubs decayed and fell to pieces. Misguided men were no doubt disposed to continue them, but the people *at large*, having ~~them~~ no longer any interest in supporting their authorities, they were every where put down without a struggle: and now, whatever faults or imperfections may be ascribed to the government of

France, it is certainly not one of them, that its operations are controled or menaced by meetings of the people; and if its authority is to be imputed to great power and tyranny, it shews at least that the strength of government has nothing to fear from an extended representation.

This is not the form or fashion of society in a particular nation, or in a singular conjuncture, but it is the universal law which pervades civil life throughout all regions and in all ages; and not civil life only, but the life of all created things, and the existence of the whole material world. It is the free transmission of that, which constitutes substances throughout all the parts which compose them, that alone can preserve them.

The humours of the human body, which occasionally deform its beauty, and impair its strength, are not in themselves diseases, but indications that the body is generally diseased: they are but the poisoned symptoms of imperfect circulation, and the cure must be conducted accordingly. If their dispersion is attempted without touching their causes, they disappear, it is true, from the surface, and the medical, like the political quack, is applauded; but the true physician discovers only in this apparent restoration the sure prognostic of death. Science, therefore, commences its reformation in the primary seat of vital movements; it sets free the juices throughout all the capillaries of the body, and without a knife, or an embrocation, the sores insensibly dry up, convert themselves into dust, and the lazarus rises from his couch. In the same manner, when the sap which belongs to the entire structure of the vegetable kingdom, is obstructed in its course to the remotest branches of every plant that grows, it is not merely these defrauded branches which perish; the trunk itself that monopolizes the nourishment of which it only ought to be the conduit, is speedily encrusted with canker, and consumed to its very root. Even the

inanimate mass of matter exists by the same rules. It is some universal though hidden union which holds its substances together ; and whenever from any cause it is impeded or destroyed, their surfaces become covered with deleterious incrustations, which, in process of time, will dissolve the hardest of them, until their atoms are scattered to the wind.

The ruling principle of the present moment is most naturally the terror of revolution, and wisdom, therefore, directs our view to its causes ; because, without that consideration, we may be running upon danger in our very zeal to escape from it. The causes of revolutions are within reach of every body, if pride would stoop to regard them. Whatever may be the original defects of civil establishments, history affords few examples of violent changes (otherwise than by conquest), except when they grossly degenerate from their principles, whatever they may be. All primitive governments are, to a great degree, founded in social freedom, however defectively it may be secured. A spirit of liberty and equality pervaded even the vassalage of the feudal conquerors of Europe. Undue delegation of power and occasional abuse of it only served to rouse unadulterated man to an early and timely assertion of himself. The former changes in society were, therefore, dignified and merciful. But corruption brutalizes and debases ; her votaries are stupidly insensible, and, as this contagion must, in the nature of things, stop short of the great mass of the people, the multitude separated from their superiors are of course the indignant reformers ; and the lazy, profligate, bloated abusers of rational and useful eminence are knocked on the head like seals whom the tide has left sleeping upon the shore.

This is the clue to the wonders that surround us. Human nature is precisely the same. It is the corruption of establishments, ten thousand times worse than the rudest dominion of tyranny, which has

changed, and is changing, the face of the modern world. The old parliament of France had no resemblance to the modern parliament of Paris when monarchy fell to the ground. The States of Holland, under the immortal Prince of Orange, were lost in every thing but the name when the French crossed the Waal to destroy them, and it was not the freezing of the river that secured the conquest, but because the hearts of the inhabitants were frozen by the abuses of their government. In the same manner the Netherlands passed away from the Emperor. The *joyeuse entree* of the good Duke of Burgundy had been for centuries nibbled away by monopolies and restrictions before the Belgians even murmured against his authority. This venerable constitution was offered to be restored at last: but the offer was too late, as all offers must necessarily be when they proceed from those who can no longer keep what they are ready from necessity to grant. Such were the concessions of Charles the First to his parliament; of Great Britain to America; and of France, when her notables were assembled. Even the horse knows when his rider strokes his neck from affection or from fear.

The subject proposed is now brought to its conclusion. Deeply impressed with its importance, of which indeed every hour that passes is furnishing some new and awful example, I have given my observations, defective as they are, openly and without reserve to the public, and I have ventured to subscribe them with my name, at the risk of the many calumnies which they are sure to draw down upon me. My opinions concerning the advantage of a radical reformation in the representation of the House of Commons have been expressed from no disrespect for that high assembly, to which I owe a reverence and a duty, both as a member and a subject, but from a most sincere and equal attachment to all the branches of the constitution. They may long flow risk

together, if they will always be contented to hold their own places in the system which gave them birth. It can only be from an attempt to change or to enlarge them that a scuffle may ensue, in which all of them may be usurped.

I am perfectly aware that every thing I have written will be ineffectual for the present; the cloud that hangs over us is as yet too thick to be penetrated by a light so feeble. It is much easier to scourge vice than to dissipate error. Indolent indifference, timorous inactivity, and mistaken virtue, are great causes of our present misfortunes; they apply to ten times the number of those who are materially affected by self-interest; and of the three the last is by far the most mischievous; not only because principles of energy are more dangerous than those which incline men to be passive, but because there is some thing awful and fascinating in virtue, however misguided, and however destructive from its errors. The truth is, we were suddenly placed by the most extraordinary events in a new situation, both as it regarded our moral feelings as good men, and our prudence as enlightened members of civil life.

The conjuncture I allude to, under any circumstances, would have been a stumbling block to many; coming in critical aid of the desperate projects of ambition and corruption, it became for a season irresistible; it still continues to be dangerously powerful, but it will insensibly wear away. I have had a thousand opportunities of observing its influence amongst those valuable classes of men who take the deepest interest in whatever appears to be connected with the moral order of the world. Propensities so perfectly worthy deserve a greater reward than man can confer on them; but they are apt, without great caution, to lead men beyond the sphere of their duties, as every thing must necessarily be which is wholly beyond the limits of our contracted powers. The extravagance of pious but misdirected zeal may work

as much evil as the outrages of impiety. Men become mad from arrogance and presumption, when they presume to decide upon consequences far beyond the reach of human forecast, and they become wicked to a degree, from which nothing but madness ought to ward off punishment, when they support in their own country the grossest abuses, and the most ruinous waste of the resources of future ages, under the pretence of arresting those mighty and never ceasing changes of the world, the consequences of which no mortal strength can subdue, and which are as much beyond our capacities as they are foreign to our concerns.

From such extraordinary conjunctures much better fruits may be gathered by a modest consideration of them, as furnishing the most awful and instructive lessons for our conduct and reformation.

The French revolution, by shewing the irresistible force of popular zeal and fury, may be expected to teach the regular governments of the world to beware how they provoke them by acts of injustice and oppression, or by the gradual sling of political establishments from the great protective ends of their institutions. It may inculcate the wisdom of moderate and insensible changes, as the mutable and perishable nature of all social establishments may require them; and, above all, it may remind them of a truth quite universal and incontrovertible, but which seems to be too little adverted to, that when men are really happy under their governments, they never push their reasonings upon political *theories* to extravagant conclusions, much less combine to reduce them by force into *practice*, at the hazard of all the horrors and sufferings, which to some extent or other, every revolution must unavoidably produce.

To the governed the lesson may not be the less momentous. It may serve as a warning to the inhabitants of all nations not suddenly to push the reformati ons of society beyond the pitch of prudence and

the analogies of experience ; to consider government as a practical thing, rather to build upon the foundations laid by the united wisdom of social man, improving upon the model by the rising lights of the world, than to assume at once the exercise and practice of their full rights *merely because the rights unquestionably belong to them*, instead of consenting by inflexible and peaceable operations to adopt such changes and modifications of popular authority as may answer the full purposes of social security and happiness ; but, above all, it may serve, as with the voice and force of thunder, to sink deep into the hearts both of princes and people never to suffer their support of human authority, or their zeal for the correction of its abuses, however desirable or important, to supersede that system of benevolence towards our fellow-creatures, the first and grand precept of our religion, whose observance is the key-stone of human happiness, and whose breach is the source of all the miseries which afflict and agitate the world.

These are the lessons which it may be expected to teach to every nation as considered by itself. For the regulation of separate communities in their concerns with others, future ages will probably, looking back to the distracted councils of Great Britain during this unparalleled crisis, have resort to them as negative example of prudent government. It will teach particular states to confine their interferences with the affairs of other countries within the bounds which are calculated to secure their own territories and independence. It will cause them to beware how they arrogantly assume to themselves against the first laws of nature, and the obvious plans of Providence in the progressive changes of the world, the right of arresting the awful and majestic course of freedom contending against usurped authority, whatever may be the fury or irregularity of its course. It will also serve to remind the rulers of nations in the neighbourhood of changes arising from abuses of authority,

that abuses of authority are the constant forerunners of changes, and the causes by which they are produced.

There is one further and last example to be derived to future ages from the present fortunes of Great Britain, which it rests with the people of England to furnish to the world. By coming forward at this moment with prudence and with order, with a submission which wisdom dictates to every people to their established government, but with a firmness which at the same time reminds that government, that it exists only for their benefit and by their consent, they may yet preserve their country. This majestic and commanding conduct, will demonstrate to future times, and to other nations, that there is no state of adversity which ought to reduce a great people to despair; that national adversity cannot even exist for any long season, but from wicked misgovernment, and shameful submission to it; and that the advantage of our free constitution (well worthy of all the blood that has been shed for it; and which may yet be shed to preserve it) is, that it possesses within itself the means of its own reformation; insuring to its subjects an exemption from revolution, the worst of all possible evils, except that confirmed establishment of tyranny and oppression for which there is no other cure.

THE END.



